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Arcady

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IN SEARCH OF ARCADY

Nina Wilco[illegible] [illegible]utnam

In Search of Arcady

BY

NINA WILCOX PUTNAM

FROM the moment of the arrival of Cecil Fitz-Williams, Earl of Chamboyne, in America, the best-laid plans for the capture of an American heiress seem to go persistently awry.

It is in the open country of New England that a very romantic little tale unravels itself, for the young Scotchman quite loses his heart to Lolli Plashta, ostensibly a gypsy, and the proprietress of the quaintest little traveling cart that dispenses millinery and notions to the New England countryside.

How the Earl, in quest of Arcady, becomes an itinerant vendor of summer cottage furniture; how the search leads him into the picturesque gypsy camps; and how he rescues Lolli Plashta from violence at the hands of the gypsies make a very enjoyable story.

Illustrated

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IN SEARCH OF ARCADY

Nina Wilcox Putnam

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"The world seemed horribly quiet all at once"

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BY

NINA WILCOX PUTNAM

ILLUSTRATIONS BY

J. SCOTT WILLIAMS

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TO

MY GYPSY SELF

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IN SEARCH OF ARCADY

I

REFERS TO MARRIAGE

AND which of these young ladies is to be my wife, Toots, my dear?" inquired the Earl of Chamboyne, leaning against the steamer rail and gazing over the swaying mass of humanity which waited to greet the incoming steamer.

That monitor of his affairs, Lady Hylliary, strong in her position as his marital guide, rose to the somewhat difficult occasion, and pointed without hesitation to where a large black-plumed hat stood out conspicuously amongst the spring finery on the dock.

"She is probably not far from that black hat," she replied. "There is only one woman in the city of New York who could manage to keep the crowd from rubbing shoulders with her, and that is my sister Adele: her daughter, dear child, is probably with her. I should say, Cissy, that the future Countess of Chamboyne is the girl in pink who, you will observe, is the

only person inside the charmed circle with the black hat; but it is hard to see from here."

"What beats me is that you should be sure that the fair Barbara will have me," laughed Chamboyne.

"Don't worry, my dear boy," replied Lady Hylliary. "If she won't, there are plenty of rich young women here who will. You may leave it all to me."

The sunshine was dazzling. All about them the smaller river craft scuttled away from the huge vessel as she was gradually coaxed to her moorings, squeaking their greetings as they fled. All white arose the towers of Manhattan, white were the wreaths of smoke they sent aloft — pretty counterfeits of the fleecy masses scattered across the sky's vivid expanse; white-flecked little waves broke on the river tide, and above them, like truant foam crests, swept the myriad broad-winged gulls of the harbour; while within the cavernous gloom of the dock welcoming handkerchiefs flickered and flared above the crowd, like little tongues of white flame. The air was sweet and bracing, and the atmosphere quick with the energy which spurs us to haste.

As the vessel, with a roaring and churning of waters, swung alongside the dock, obliterating its crowded

interior and presenting to the two upon the promenade deck only the dull, slanting roof, the earl pulled out his watch and gave a whistle as he noted the time.

"By Jove!" he exclaimed. "I shall never be able to catch that train — the Berkshire Express, Sam called it, I think — unless I'm able to rush off at once."

"You won't be able to," responded Lady Hylliary, who was familiar with the American custom-house. "And I don't want you to rush right off, either, before you have met my sister and her daughter."

"But, Toots, I can do that when I get back from Sam's," objected the earl. "Surely you can manage to keep Miss Chichester safely for me just these few days while I'm away?"

"Dare say I can," she answered him, "but I do think it's a nuisance, your running off like this."

"It's keeping an old compact," he told her seriously. "Go to him at once on landing, you know; I promised the dear old boy I would."

"It's an absurd promise to have made," declared Lady Hylliary, "and a ridiculous one to keep; but if you are quite determined, why we had better plunge into the crowd at once. Only promise to wait

a moment and meet my sister and my niece, Barbara."

"Very well," he assented, and then, as if indeed the American climate had already affected him, he looked at his watch again.

"Come along," she cried, "or those reporters will rediscover us!"

And hastened by this fear they joined the stream of travellers who were being rapidly poured through the narrow gangway on to the dock.

The roar of that inferno greeted them confusedly, and in another moment the crowd had swept them against the ropes in the close vicinity of that much-observed black hat, which, contrary to expectation, did not belong to Lady Hylliary's sister, but to a stout woman who was bellowing a wifely welcome to an asthmatic old gentleman.

"I can't think where they can be," muttered Lady Hylliary, as the earl and she were rushed along. Then she caught sight of a familiar face beyond the palings which restrained the unlicensed public from coming on to the dock. "Why, there's Adele!" cried her ladyship. "Forgot to get a permit, I'll be bound! Come at once and be introduced."

"Toots, my dear, I *can't!*" insisted the earl. "I'll have to look after my luggage and things, you know."

"But, Cissy," began Lady Hylliary.

"Your maid can do for you, but I've to do for myself," he replied in eager apology, "and I must positively get my bags at once or I shall lose my train—good-bye; forgive me, but I must run. You'll be all right now, won't you?"

And before she could expostulate further he was gone, the crowd dividing them instantly like a pair of straws on a stream.

From a distance he saw Lady Hylliary greeted with warmth by a handsome woman of middle age who kissed her effusively on both cheeks; and by a very pretty girl — a wonderful vision in pink, with a lace-trimmed hat, beneath which shone a mass of smooth, golden hair and a well-set pair of placid blue eyes. Her slender hands fluttered out toward Lady Hylliary for an instant, and then fluttered back to a straying veil of chiffon, also pink. The earl murmured something regretful about his hasty retreat, wondered if he could manage to get back to Toots before she left with her people, and then his attention was absorbed by a brass-buttoned official, to the temporary

exclusion of everything else. A short, wordy tussle ensued; Chamboyne proved himself a non-resident, and finally was permitted to make a dash for the street — and liberty! Outside, the gathering was great and various. A brass band suddenly filled the air with melodious clangour, and a body of plainly dressed women formed into a phalanx, edging the crowd aside in doing so. Their purpose was soon shown, and the last that the earl saw of Lady Hylliary was her triumphal absorption by this body of ladies, whose badges and banners proclaimed them addicted to "women's rights."

Mrs. Chichester was swept aside by them, and in a fleeting, backward glance the earl noted with a curious, premature sense of satisfaction that the girl in pink clung to her arm as though frightened.

"Thank heaven, she is evidently not a suffragette!" he exclaimed, as he threw himself into a taxicab. "And my humble praise in the same quarter for my merciful escape before Tootsie's friends spotted her!"

And so, while Lady Hylliary was borne off by her admiring sisters in oppression, the earl made his way through the labyrinth of the Grand Central Station and found himself at last ensconced in a corner of a

gaudy, stuffy parlour car (entitled "Mozart," for some unknown reason), where a grinning coloured porter seemed bent upon proving a lifelong devotion to him. There was a grinding and screaming of steel upon steel, the train shed began to slip back, and he was off upon his long-promised visit to his best-loved friend, Samuel Prescott.

For a while he looked out of the window, but soon tired of the succession of untidy back yards of cheap dwellings, and the reading of advice, painted in huge letters upon proportionate sign-boards, to use Soandso's typewriter, or Someone's fly screens; and so turned his attention to the inner vision of that delicately tinted girl in pink.

He examined her critically, recalling the golden hair, the red mouth, the large blue eyes, and the shy flutter of her timid hand. She was pretty, certainly — much more so than he had expected. She might even be called good form. A trifle insipid, perhaps, but graceful and possessed of a certain sweet dignity that pleased him. Then, of course, she was rich . . . the Chichesters were rich, and he was poor. . . .

That type of girl was scarcely the sort which flared up at one, he mused, no matter what went amiss —

and that was another point in her favour. He hated a woman who was hard to get along with, who made scenes: indeed, he cared little about women of any sort, for, though very young, the earl was a mighty hunter of wild beasts, and had so far left the gentler game to those who ventured no farther afield than the drawing-room hearths of England, while he found his amusement in the African jungle or the Himalayas. . . . Therefore he was glad she looked so amiable and unassertive. She would grow into a calm woman, with a good deal of beauty, and, as she would probably become heavy in time, he felt he could be sure of her having a proper dignity and poise. That yellow hair of hers was nice, too. He thought that the Chamboyne emeralds would look well in it. He was glad that they were still his, and had not gone the way of the rest of the family jewels, which slipped so easily through the fingers of his handsome, prodigal father. They were really "rather decent," those emeralds — his one valuable possession — and he liked to think of them in her hair and on her slender young throat; for the Chichesters were rich, very rich, and he was poor. . . .

Yes, she was very attractive, and he was well pleased;

and yet — she looked so young and seemed so unsophisticated, so unsuspecting! The matrimonial scheme which Lady Hylliary had implanted in his head, implicating this pretty niece of hers, Barbara Chichester, made him vaguely uneasy, and he squirmed in his chair as though he had suddenly discovered a tack in its cushioned depths. The thought which so affected him was unformulated, but it was unpleasant, and so he dismissed it, as he was in the habit of doing with anything which bored or troubled him.

A lovely panorama was flashing by. Gone were the sign-boards, gone the tenements and pictures of crude humanity, gone the suburbs and the desolate, desecrating trolley lines; and in their stead appeared the crowding hills and narrow valleys of Berkshire, verdant of field and generous of forest — a land of promise and of rest. He leaned back with a sigh of relief. Here in the heart of the hills he would surely find respite before bending his energies to the gentle but not too welcome task before him. . . . Still, she was lovely, very lovely, with her pale-gold hair. . . .

With a start, he realized that it had grown dark, and the conductor was calling his station. Scrambling to his feet, he engaged in a struggle with a quantity

of hand luggage, of which the ever-ready coloured porter soon disburdened him, and in another moment he was standing upon the platform of a dingy little station, where, from some dark region above a swinging lantern, he heard Prescott's voice shouting an uproarious greeting.

II

IS VERY SYLVAN

SAMUEL PRESCOTT was the one man whom, from a hundred, one would have been least likely to pick out as an intimate friend of Cecil Fitz-Williams. The young earl was stalwart, athletic, fonder of using his muscles than his brains; an aristocrat among aristocrats, kind-hearted, but maintaining a distinct aloofness toward his social inferiors which was not snobbishness, but an inborn pride of position and the inherited habit of commanding. He was an absolutely conventional person, bred from a long line of conventional ancestors in conventional surroundings.

Prescott, on the other hand, was a narrow-chested, hatchet-faced scholar, with strong socialistic tendencies, and scarcely a penny to his name. (For which lack he atoned by formulating a wealth of schemes for the benevolence of mankind, and several most extra-

ordinarily clever and elaborate systems of distributing other people's riches in just and equal measure to all who had none of their own.) He had never grasped even the rudiments of cricket, at which Cecil excelled; found tennis absurd; and shuddered at the notion of slaughtering unsuspecting grouse. He was a Rhodes scholar and had met Chamboyne during his second year at Oxford. Although they belonged to the same college, Balliol, in the natural course of events they would probably never have met, owing to the wide difference in their habits of life; but one day Cecil ran Prescott down with his motor-car, picked him up, and, metaphorically speaking, never put him down again.

At this moment, Cecil lay on the grass with his tweed cap pulled over his eyes, his thumbs thrust into the belt of his tweed jacket, and his head against the trunk of an ancient elm tree on the overgrown lawn of Prescott's home in Massachusetts. His eyes were closed and his great muscular length of body basked in the warm sunshine, while he listened to the familiar twang of his friend's voice as Prescott told him, for the hundredth time, how wicked it was for a man to possess an income for which he did not work, empha-

sizing his periods with great energy and growing more and more impassioned as he warmed to his favourite theme.

The earl, deliciously conscious of the spring, did not hear a word that his friend said. Indeed, though he had heard this particular tirade often, he had never really grasped the context of it; he was always too much absorbed by the banjo twang in which it was recited. Occasionally he interjected an "I say, old fellow, what rot!" at hazard, to which Prescott, taking it as the con of the argument, would make a fervent reply, bolstering his theories with much vigour and logic.

"And so, my dear fellow, you cannot justify your existence from any standpoint!" Prescott was concluding by way of peroration. "A man who lives on an inherited capital, however small, is a parasite, sapping the energies of the nation and giving nothing in return. I, with my market garden over there, by intensive cultivation — by exacting from nature the fullest portion of her gifts — am of more value to my community than you, for all your so-called 'position,' are to yours. At least I offer my customers good vegetables for a fair price! What, pray, do you offer to your fellow citizens?"

Cecil arose slowly to his splendid height and stretched himself luxuriously.

"Believe I'll take a walk, old chap," he said abruptly at the end of a prodigious yawn.

"In this heat?" exclaimed Prescott aghast. "Why, it's exhausting! Why don't you wait until later, when the sun gets down a little? It's only three o'clock."

"I think I'll go now," replied his friend.

"I hope I'm not driving you away with my argument," said Samuel. "I did not want quite so complete a victory as that."

"What rot!" said the earl; "it's not that, of course. The truth is, I have got to be off shortly — to-morrow perhaps — and I've to make up my mind about something before I go. So I'd an idea I'd just tramp a little, while I did a bit of thinking."

"Going?" exclaimed Prescott in a tone of deep dismay. "Why, you've only just come! You have only been here three days, and now you talk of leaving us. What's up, old man?"

"Well, you see I've a sort of arrangement to — well, to get married, you see, so ——"

"Married?" yelled Prescott, springing to his feet in puny alarm. "To whom, may I ask? Since when?"

"Tush, tush, Sammy, be quiet," admonished the earl. "I don't at all know to whom, as yet; but my cousin, Janet Hylliary, is going to arrange it, if she can, in such a way that I shall be obliged to make as little effort as possible: some nice, rich, and ambitious girl, you know."

Prescott dropped back into his seat with a groan.

"Good Lord! I didn't think it of you, Cissy," he moaned; "to put yourself up at auction like any rotten-titled foreigner! To sell yourself like a silly woman who has to marry for a home! It's immoral, man! It's immoral!"

Chamboyne looked much distressed.

"That's rather the way I feel myself," he replied uneasily, as usual absorbing the feeling but not the words of Prescott's speech. "So, you see, I've jolly well got to think it all out carefully. Of course, there's the estates and the town house to think of, and keeping them up, and not letting the title grow too shabby, and all that. Can't say that I see any way out of it except marryin' money. Same time, as you say, it isn't an awfully pleasant thing to have to do."

"Pleasant!" said Prescott weakly. "If your only objection to the situation is the fear of being bored,

I think you had better take a long walk and sweat it out of you. Perhaps you will then be able to see other reasons for not doing it. As for going to-morrow, you may go as soon as you choose if you decide to undertake any such rank business as marrying in cold blood for purely financial reasons!"

The speaker gathered up his books and papers with vehemence and strutted into the house, closing the door after him with a bang.

The earl gazed after his irate host with mild astonishment, and wondered what the deuce the row was about. Then he took off his cap, looked at it fixedly for a moment, replaced it on his curly red head, put his walking stick under his arm, thrust his thumbs through the belt of his jacket again, and sauntered through the gate and down the road.

Although it was only the first week of June, the day was hot as midsummer and the atmosphere danced with a heat as fierce and penetrating as that of July. All the young green things seemed to expand and grow before his very eyes, yielding themselves to the magic spell of early summer. In the thickets the pale flame of the brier-rose showed here and there, and other blossoms less familiar to English eyes.

On one hand great rock-strewn pastures slanted upward to the hill crest, and, on the other, broad meadow lands, green and smooth and studded with a million yellow stars, rolled down into the valley, which was divided in the centre by a willow-fringed river. Brown hedgerows, delicately brushed with green, separated field from field, with blossom-powdered, slender, wild cherry trees breaking the level boundary here and there. Now he passed a newly turned field, red from the harrow; again, one misted over with the foamy green of a young crop, and sentinelled in the middle by an exquisitely symmetrical elm. Then again past dank, lush meadows where sleek cattle waded deep in the rich grasses; then an orchard, laden with promise of abundant harvest; then more broad fields with their lonely elm trees. Square white houses tucked under the lee of the hills, nestled cosily into the landscape which they fitted so well; crops were sown with a lavish disregard of space economy. Here the ample bosom of nature had room to spare for all her children, and her goodness to them was unstinting. So went the panorama — always the same, always new — in a repetition which was never monotonous. It seemed to Cecil rather like War-

wickshire, grown to almost unbelievable proportions, and a little ragged at the edges.

The direction which he had taken led away from the region of fine country estates and fashionable cottages, toward that section to which the railroad had not yet penetrated, and which, save for a score of tiny villages and an occasional farm, was almost uninhabited. The rough-edged, sandy roads were there, but the travellers upon them few and infrequent, and the automobile — that scenic vandal — a thing unknown. The walk was invigorating, and, shaking off his recent depression, Cecil became absorbed in his surroundings to the entire exclusion of Miss Barbara Chichester or any other possible Countess Chamboyne.

A few straggling buildings bespoke the approach to a village, and presently he passed along an irregular street, lined with queer, squat little white houses with high pointed roofs, which ought to have been ugly but somehow were not so at all. At the end of this crooked street he came upon a green surrounded by a whitewashed rail fence. In this enclosure an incongruous-looking group of men and boys were playing what he knew to be baseball. The entire population seemed gathered to watch the game, or participate

in it, and even the one shop which the place boasted stood open and deserted while the proprietor pitched for the home team.

Not understanding the game nor caring to join the crowd upon the fence, Chamboyne passed on through the village, crossed a little wooden bridge, and struck out along a narrow road which led beside a purling rivulet. Gnarled and stunted faggot willows lined its course, and once his trained sportsman's eye caught the gleam of a leaping trout. On and on he walked, following the lure of the unknown road.

It was a winding way, twisting along the base of the hills for several miles, and then, after a gentle upgrade, running along a narrow ledge a hundred feet or so above the valley. Here stalwart pine trees overarched, almost shutting out the sun, and casting a cool, brown shade that fell gratefully upon the eyes after the white glare of the sandy stretch just passed. By this time he had covered a considerable distance, but still the bewitching road seemed to beckon him, and he followed.

Just beyond the pine grove the road broadened where a rill rushed down the upper bank into a moss-grown trough; and here, in the shade of a storm-beaten

oak, Cecil sat down to rest, first plunging his face for an instant into the limpid, bubbling water.

The heat was intense, and the silence was of that pregnant sort which precedes a summer storm, though as yet the clouds had not begun to gather. As he sat there, motionless, he let his imagination have free rein, entranced by the magic beauty of the place, its remoteness, the sylvan loveliness which made it seem enchanted. He half expected to see furry-eared fauns peeping at him from the thicket; and when an erratic cottontail rabbit scurried across the road, he fancied it was in pursuit of some elfin-piping. The glamour of the season, of the road, of his own dreamy mind, was carrying him out of himself. He wanted to roam about indefinitely in this impossibly fascinating country that held such infinite possibilities. He tried to bring his thoughts back to those things on which he had come out expressly to meditate, but could not; and, after a rather feeble attempt, gave it up and abandoned himself to his spring-begotten fancies.

"This path should lead to some enchanted spot," he said aloud. "By Jove! I feel in the mood to see any sort of sorcery or fairy-craft!"

Glancing about, he then noticed for the first time a sort of rough, grass-grown track leading up the hill side before him. Of all the charming by-roads he had seen this looked the most inviting, and, after a moment's hesitation, he arose and began its ascent.

As he entered the fringe of a little wood on the plateau to which it led, he sniffed the air delicately, throwing back his handsome head like a high-bred horse, and then nodding it with conviction. Yes, it was smoke — very faint, though — probably a dying camp fire. That any one should camp out in such a delightful spot did not surprise him; curiosity impelled him to go further, and he made his way deeper into the grove in the direction of the smoke, which was now faintly visible.

The semi-cleared space into which he emerged, and which was the terminus of the grass road, was circled about with young trees and saplings, and flecked in an umbrageous pattern by the yellow sunlight filtering through the foliage. Near the centre was an oak which towered above its neighbours, and beneath this stood a little two-wheeled cart with a canvas roof and curtains. The shafts of this odd wagon rested on the ground, tilting the body to an angle which ap-

peared most precarious for its contents. It was a strange little conveyance, with its yellow body and red wheels, and its white roof, which the supporting hoops of iron ribbed in the semblance of a gigantic caterpillar. The curtain flap hung down loosely. Near the wagon a small bonfire smoked feebly, smothered in damp leaves to preserve it during the builder's absence, while close by were a few cooking vessels of copper, brightly burnished, and a blanket that had been spread upon the thicket to dry. Then temptation fell upon the earl, and, for the first time in his life, he wished to steal: for, neatly arranged upon a flat stone that stood conveniently for the purpose, was a tea caddy, sugar in a crock, a little jug of milk, biscuits in a tin, a blue cup and saucer of large proportions, and a substantial brown earthenware teapot, fat and comfortable to behold. A copper kettle filled with fresh water stood ready to be hung over the fire.

"The deuce! This fellow must be English!" exclaimed Cecil. "What luck, stumbling upon his place just at this time! Hope he has another cup."

He eyed the single bit of china wistfully, and then remarked, "Hello, there! You! Where are you?"

For a moment no responsive sound broke the stillness, and then he heard the neigh of a horse in some near-by pasture. Then silence.

"I say! Any one here?" the earl called again.

No answer.

"Wonder where the blooming chap's gone," he muttered. "Can't be far, for he evidently expects to return soon."

Then his eye fell upon an almost invisible path through the underbrush, which apparently led still farther into the wood. Determining to find his unconscious host and at all hazards procure an invitation to tea, he set off along this, and presently was surprised to see the glint of water between the tree trunks. Pushing ahead eagerly, in another moment he found himself upon the shore of a miniature lake. After a single glance, he stood motionless, fairly paralyzed with delight.

Upon a tall black rock that jutted out into the water sat a Dryad, her beautiful nude body silhouetted against the dark bank behind her. She was tall, and of exquisite proportions, with lovely slender hands and narrow little feet. Her heavy black hair was wound about her small head in massive braids, and

over her ears were clusters of late dogwood blossoms. She held more white flowers in her hands and around her throat was a long chain of scarlet berries which hung down between her firm little breasts. Her face was as clear cut as a cameo, with wide-set eyes, and full, red lips. She was deeply absorbed in dissecting one of the flowers, and completely oblivious of her surroundings.

Cecil stood rooted to the spot, an electric fire playing through his veins. The thick tangle of green things concealed him effectively, but he was quite unconscious of this, or of anything, in fact, save the lovely picture before him. The heat waves danced over the sunlit pool, and the tinkle of the little waterfall which fed it fell on his ears like tiny chimes from a magic belfry. Green rushes and other water plants grew in the margin at his feet, and delicate Indian pipe — frail carvings of some woodland gnome; but he saw none of them, for, at the base of the great rock, the water was limpid and deep, and trembled where it received the reflection of the white figure above it.

For one long, unforgettable moment he stood gazing at her. Then a twig snapped beneath his feet, and with a startled gesture the Dryad sprang up, glanced

wildly about without seeing him, and in another instant had disappeared, only a floating spray of white blossoms betraying that her presence had been real.

The sound also awoke Cecil to the realization that the girl had been human, and with the hot colour mounting to his curly red hair, he turned abruptly and fled.

Half-way down the grass road he paused irresolutely, glanced back at the patch of woods, snapped his fingers, and "Oh, damn!" regretfully, and resumed his retreat.

The road, which had been so short and pleasant on his outward journey, now appeared dusty, lonely, and unaccountably long. He seemed to have come a great many miles, and for a fact he had walked at least nine or ten before he fell upon his adventure. His head was whirling with all sorts of wild dreams and imaginings, in which the lady of the little pool figured largely. He felt like some young Greek god baffled in pursuit of a water-sprite. How wonderful she was! What a fool he had been to run away! Yet, of course, that had been the only decent thing to do. Jove—! what red lips she had — she was too glorious — he must have dreamed it — such things don't happen!

Yet no! She *was* real. Had he not seen her move, almost heard her breathe? But if she was real, it was pretty rotten of him to have looked at all, although he was jolly glad he had! Had she seen him? No, he was certain she had not; her alarm had been general. Dryads were easily frightened. It still seemed hardly possible that she could be human, she was so white, so very white — transparent, almost. Suddenly he remembered the tea things set out on the flat stone, the tea things and the very large blue cup. He stopped in the road and slapped his knee, laughing aloud. Oh, yes! she *was* human, right enough!

He had been trudging along for what seemed like hours, and was nearing the village where he had seen the ball game, when the sounds of an approaching horse caused him to turn around. And there, advancing at a tremendous rate, was a little canvas covered cart, drawn by a sturdy pony with broad hoofs and a shaggy coat. Cecil flattened himself against the rail of the narrow bridge on which he stood to let it pass. On it came, the brightly painted wheels twinkling in the late sunlight. Eagerly he peered under the projecting hood, and uttered a broken exclamation of delight. The sole occupant was a

girl, gypsy-clad in many colours, and the face was that of the Dryad!

The cart passed, enveloping him in a cloud of dust, the driver apparently unaware of the stalwart figure by the roadside; but he, looking after it, read the little sign that swung behind:

LOLLI PLASHTA
MILLINERY, DRY GOODS, AND
NOTIONS

At supper that evening the Earl of Chamboyne, struggling with the inevitable pie, suddenly addressed his friend, ruthlessly interrupting a dissertation upon the merits of the uniform wage system, with the remark:

"I say, old boy, believe I'll stay on a bit, if I may."

"So you've decided it *that* way," said Prescott delightedly, recalling the conversation of the early afternoon. "I felt sure you would; you are never the sort of fellow who goes in for such a beastly kind of affair."

"Right-o," replied Chamboyne, his mind slowly returning to Lady Hylliary and her marriage-broking for the first time since his return from that momentous walk. Then as he more fully grasped the gist of

Prescott's remark, he added with emphasis, "Of course not, of course not; you're quite right."

Samuel looked at him in some astonishment, but, after a perplexed moment, decided to let it pass, and asked for the butter. Old Mr. Prescott, however, leaned over and touched Cecil on the shoulder. Being somewhat deaf himself, he always felt it necessary to attract the attention of others in this fashion before speaking, as if they, too, shared his affliction.

"I'm glad you will stay," said he, having caught Chamboyne's first remark. "You make our life more normal, somehow." And he glanced a little wistfully at his son, who at that moment took up the Cause of Labour again.

III

LADY HILLIARY THINKS: "I TOLD YOU SO!"

LADY HYLLIARY reached for another cigarette, fitted it into her amber mouthpiece, lit it, and looked at her sister judicially.

"Adele, my dear," she remarked, "you are a very good-looking woman for your age. How you have managed to preserve so much of your beauty through a score or more seasons in this glaring, dusty, noisy New York is a miracle! For of all the exhausting, nerve-wrecking ——"

"Don't speak so disparagingly of your native city, Janet," interrupted Mrs. Chichester. "Remember you were born here; you are a native, after all. Not that any one would accuse you of it, though," she added; "you're more English now than your husband."

"I thought so, too — almost," said Lady Hylliary softly, "until I sailed into the harbour at noon yester-

day and passed that absurd old Statue of Liberty; then I did not feel so convinced of my extradition. You may laugh at me, my dear, if you will, but positively the sight of that hideous piece of ironmongery made me cry! Perfect rot, of course, such sentimentality at my years and with my principles; but I suppose I have a bit of patriotism in me somewhere — tucked away where I'd forgotten it."

"It's such a long, long time since you were here last!" said Mrs. Chichester. "It must be twenty years! How strange everything must look to you."

"More than twenty years!" replied Lady Hylliary. "We went to India just before Barbara was born, don't you remember? And she is — how old?"

"Twenty-two," said Barbara's mother. "This is her second season."

But Lady Hylliary's thoughts had been switched into another channel for the instant.

"Fifteen years of India!" she dreamed, blowing thin wreaths of blue smoke which settled like halos around her trim blond head. "Fearfully long time; but amusing, too, in a way." She laughed reminiscently.

Lady Hylliary did not look half her age, having adopted golden curls which framed her face in flat clusters, and a carefully corseted, thin figure. She might almost have passed for twenty-five in the uncertain afternoon light of the large drawing room, the heavy curtains softening the glare of spring sunshine which was flooding the crowded avenue outside. But, as a matter of fact, she was near fifty. She was dressed in the expensive, dowdy manner of the true Englishwoman, and her pose was careless and rather ungraceful. But her clean-cut, piquant features and keen gray eyes betrayed a sharp sense of humour — an American inheritance.

Mrs. Chichester, slightly younger than her sister, looked older, although by no means matronly; and, combined with her persistent prettiness, was a certain weak and pettish expression. Her mouth drooped at the corners in a pathetic manner which she had thought expedient to cultivate, and which, when accentuated, she had found to be her strongest weapon against her husband on occasions of minor differences. She usually spoke in a nervous, high-pitched voice, and seldom looked directly at the person whom she was addressing. Her clothes, like her house, were

over-elaborate, very expensive, and one of her principal interests in life. The remaining interests might be catalogued as follows: what her friends thought of her, what she thought of them, bridge, the marrying off of her daughter, and (though she concealed this last most carefully from her little world) her husband. Such was Mrs. Chichester — a by no means uncommon type.

"Janet, I wish you would get some decent gowns while you are here, and I'll watch you select them," she said, eying the rough tweed the other wore.

"Can't be bothered, my dear," was the reply. "My time will all be taken up with lectures. Besides, the audience will be too much absorbed by the fact of my having served three terms in jail to care about what I have on."

"Oh, this suffrage! It is simply too absurd! I can't see why you have anything to do with it!" exclaimed Mrs. Chichester, disgustedly. "And jail! Really, I should think a woman in your position would feel ——"

"My husband's position, you mean — not mine, Adele," said Janet calmly. "Jim's having talked himself into prominence during the last seven years

would give me only a very nominal position; it would not make *my* position! Now, climbing into the premier's dining-room by way of the dumbwaiter and pantry, and interrupting his dessert, did make it; that and other similar affairs! My dear, unsophisticated, downtrodden, slave-driven sister, *I* am somebody because I have done something myself. There's no reflected glory about *me!* Do you suppose that such a host of reporters would have greeted me at the boat yesterday if I had been no one but my husband's wife? Or that the crowd of enthusiastic females would have come down, or brought the band? My dear Adele, it is great fun to be one of the most talked-of suffragists in England. You should try something of the sort here. You would have a following directly, because so many people admire your clothes. Do try it; you will be awfully amused."

"I have quite enough duties already, Janet," replied Mrs. Chichester with dignity, "and troubles, too, without going out of my way to look for more. There is Barbara, for instance."

"What's she been doing? Defying authority again? I remember she was rather a handful in England."

"Janet, I wish you would speak to her," replied

the mother. "She was perfectly devoted to you two years ago when we made you that last visit, and the fact of your house having been her birthplace has always given you an added charm in her eyes. She is very sentimental, and although no one seems to have much influence over her, I think you would have some. I have none at all, nor has her father. Just think! John has actually been obliged to resort to mediæval methods, and lock her in her room!"

"Great heavens, Adele! Is he mad? In a free and civilized country, to lock up one's daughter — well, really, it's impossible!"

"It's a fact, none the less," Mrs. Chichester assured her. "It does seem dreadful, I know; but I give you my word it was only as a last resort."

"What on earth has the child been doing now?" queried her aunt.

"She has been a great trial to her father and me," said Adele Chichester plaintively, "from the time she left boarding school: still that old self-willed moodiness, at intervals. For instance, you cannot imagine what difficulty I had inducing her to make her *début*. She hates all social things, is rude to our friends, and has failed in every way to fit herself for the rôle one

would naturally expect her to play. I can scarcely ever prevail upon her to accept invitations, and she has made herself quite unpopular with most of the young people by showing them plainly that they bore her. In fact, she's interested in none of the things which one expects to appeal to a young and really very beautiful girl. She is a great disappointment to us."

"That's a rotten shame, of course," replied Lady Hylliary. "Still, you know, it's not sufficient reason for locking her up."

"Wait; you haven't heard about that yet," said the other. "For some time past she has been mysteriously absenting herself from home for several days at a time, and upon her return flatly refusing to give any explanation as to where she has been or what she has done. She returned early this morning after several days' absence."

Janet gave a long and very undignified whistle.

"By Jove, that *is* serious!" she exclaimed. "Have you questioned her in a sane and sensible manner, or did you irritate and antagonize her at the start by treating her like an irrational child?"

"I think I ought to know how to speak to my own

daughter, Janet," said Mrs. Chichester stiffly. "Of course, she had to be called to account. All she would volunteer was that she had been with friends. Jack doesn't believe that she's telling the truth. He had a serious talk with her when he came home to lunch to-day, and tried to put her on her honour not to go off again, but she flatly refused, and said we must trust her to take care of herself. What was there for him to do? He simply had to lock her in her room!"

"There! I knew it!" cried Lady Hylliary. "You set her all on edge by your smug, self-righteous attitude, and of course she wouldn't talk: no wonder!"

"Janet!" said Mrs. Chichester in a tearful voice, "I think you are too disagreeable. As though I didn't have the proper attitude toward Barbara! I brought her up, didn't I? One *must* be severe with one's child occasionally, as you would know if you had ever had one."

"Much your having had one has taught you, if you are unable to recognize her as an individual with a mind and rights of her own," snorted Lady Hylliary. "You and Jack seem to think that because the girl is your daughter she is your chattel. You forget that she has just as much right to her life as you have

to yours, and simply because you are her parents you have no justification for believing that she is unable to live it — although maybe that *is* a reason for doubting her ability," she added reflectively.

"Don't be absurd, Janet," Mrs. Chichester remarked. "The child is very young and must be safeguarded. We might overlook many serious faults, but her father considers that this is a question of her safety, perhaps her honour, and says that, if she will not give a satisfactory explanation of her absences, she must be kept under lock and key in order that these may be protected."

"Scandalous! Tyranny of Man," murmured Lady Hylliary, and lit a fresh cigarette. She then asked: "Has she ever done this sort of thing before — going off, and all that?"

Mrs. Chichester hesitated a moment before replying.

"Well, yes; she has," she answered finally. "It happened once or twice last year at about this season. I did not know of it at the time, because I was in Washington with Jack. When we returned I learned from Lang, the butler, who is an old servant and considers himself one of the family, that she had been

absent twice for a period of five or six days, simply saying that she was going and would return on such a date, but leaving no address. When I questioned her as to these trips, although she did not precisely say so, she led me to think that she had been visiting a school friend. Sometime later her father referred to the matter in the presence of the friend we thought she meant, and quickly discovered that no such visit had occurred. But then, as I said, she may have been with some other friend — she had been so vague."

"Humm!" said Janet. "That is the only time?"

"No," Mrs. Chichester made answer reluctantly; "she ran away from boarding school several times, but was always found in a few hours and brought back. Jack worries about it all dreadfully."

To tell the truth — but here even Janet's candour balked — what puzzled her ladyship most was the lack of anxiety of the girl's mother — her readiness to explain, almost to condone, Barbara's vagaries, while maintaining a becomingly censorious maternal attitude. Most mothers would be crazy with anxiety, she mused.

"It's very odd, I must admit," she said aloud. "She has always seemed such a quiet girl; intelligent,

too, though a bit heady. Have you tried to interest her in some serious occupation?"

"She has never cared much for books, and has not much artistic feeling, although she does sing rather charmingly," said Mrs. Chichester. Then catching the glint in her sister's eye, she added, "Now, Janet, you shall *not* make a suffragette of her."

"She would look charming chained to the premier's front-door bell," replied Lady Hylliary abstractedly.

"But I won't have it happen!" cried Mrs. Chichester in anxious fright. "I cannot allow my daughter to talk politics in the public street, and go to jail and — and ——"

"Very particular about what you *allow* your child to do, aren't you?" asked Lady Hylliary maliciously. "Your control over her enables you ——"

"*Please*, Janet," began Adele, pulling down the corners of her mouth tremulously, "*please*, don't try to make her a suffragette!"

"If you try that pathetic look on me, I *will*," threatened her sister. "But, matter of fact, I shan't need to try. Her own father's treatment will make her declare for the Cause quite voluntarily, never fear! But, of course, this question of her disobedience

and her secret expeditions is no laughing matter. Tell me, has she any young men hanging round her?"

"Any? She has dozens, but not one in whom she has ever shown the slightest interest."

"Any reason to suspect that she has a lover of whom you do not know?"

"Janet!"

"Oh, I simply mean some poor but worthy young man to whom you have been nasty, and whom, in consequence, Barbara has chosen to make a deity of."

"There is absolutely no such person. On that subject I am sure she has been perfectly frank with me. Indeed, I think I have always been in her confidence completely with the exception of this one matter of her absences.

"Exit the Clandestine Lover," said Lady Hylliary flippantly. "I am glad that he is a myth. Order tea, my dear, and I will tell you why I rejoice at this circumstance."

Mrs. Chichester looked sharply and curiously at her sister — a little nervously, in fact — then arose and pushed an electric button. The Anglo-American strolled to the window and gazed down upon the busy, crowded thoroughfare below. The hour was five and

the fashionable afternoon parade was at its height. The display of pretty women in beautiful clothes, smart motors, carriages with glittering harness, sunshine, colour, and movement, was very pleasant to behold. In all its interesting and alluring seasons, New York is probably never more delightful than in the mid-spring and dawn of summer. It then has such a rain-washed, sun-dried effect; an appearance of having been so beautifully cleaned and garnished, that, for once, perhaps, it is truly worthy of its vital inhabitants.

The Chichesters' house was situated just below the Plaza, and its windows commanded both the busy square and a glimpse of the park beyond. The flower beds were bright with blossoms, and in many windows of the houses opposite were boxes of gay little pansies. Below, the people jostled and smiled, passing and repassing, intent upon great things or upon nothing at all; the women smiling in conscious attractiveness; the men, brisk, prosperous, admiring; the young people laughing, often deliciously amused at anæmic witticisims of their own. An old man shuffled by with a little sign hung about his neck, and a bunch of pencils like faggots in his hand. A hurrying woman

threw a coin into his proffered hat. Two urchins dodged in and out among the crowd. One of them nearly upset a stout Jewish lady who was waiting for a 'bus.

"Here is the tea," called Mrs. Chichester as Lang entered with the tray. "Come over to the sofa. Lang, Lady Hylliary will return for dinner. Where is the lemon? Oh, there! Very well; that's all."

"The muffins are toasted. Horrid!" said the militant one, taking a large bite. "Hurrah for the marmalade; give me some on here. Strong, please, with cream."

"What is it you were going to tell me? Oh, yes; why are you so elated at Barbara's freedom of heart?" said Mrs. Chichester, entrenching herself stiffly erect among the soft cushions of the sofa.

"Tell me first if you have any particular scheme laid out for her marital happiness," demanded Lady Hylliary, lounging angularly in her corner.

"Why, no," replied Mrs. Chichester thoughtfully "There is not one of the men that we see whom I consider desirable. Those who have no money are, for the most part, charming ineligibles, while the

rich ones are usually impossibly vapid and silly. It would not do for Barbara to marry any of *them!*"

Lady Hylliary dilated her close-set gray eyes.

"Adele, your intelligence is simply astounding at times," she said. "Matter of fact, you are really brilliant in this particular instance. Of course, wild horses could not drag Barbara to the altar with one of those men; but, none the less, you are jolly right in supposing such *partis* as you describe would be highly undesirable."

Mrs. Chichester took a covert look at her sister to ascertain whether she was being made fun of or not, before answering. Unable to make up her mind on this score, she chose a neutral ground and remarked with dignity. "You forget that I am married to John."

"Which proves that you are a judge of men, my dear, for no one could deny that he possesses all the masculine qualities. But to return to the secret of my particular interest in Barbara's future husband. You see, I have brought over with me a very eligible candidate for the position."

"Good gracious! What do you mean?"

"Exactly what I say, my Victorian sister. Being

an intelligent, emancipated woman, I always make an exact statement when I make any at all. I mean that I have brought over under my wing a very charming, handsome, well-bred, only moderately impecunious boy, with the specific object of marrying him to my niece. He is of proper age and lineage, clean morally, but with some worldly experience, healthy, intelligent (or charlatan) enough to have scraped through Oxford, not over-burdened with relations (of whom Jim is one), and possessed of one of the oldest titles in Scotland. Aha! I thought you would open your eyes at that."

"Why, Janet, it sounds delightful. And they would live in Scotland, of course," said Mrs. Chichester, brightening perceptibly. Then her face fell and she shook her head. "But the probabilities are that she will not even look at him."

"Nonsense!" cried Janet, beginning on her third muffin. "Nonsense! I tell you he is very good to look upon. She will tumble right enough, provided we manage the circumstances, the environment, propinquity, and all that."

"Tell me more about him. Who is he?" Adele asked, hope flickering up again.

"He is Cissy Fitz-Williams; so called because he is a young Hercules, I suppose."

"And his *Title?*" Mrs. Chichester unconsciously gave the word a capital letter.

"He is the Earl of Chamboyne. You must have heard me speak of him, or mention him in my letters, for as both his parents are dead, Jim has been his adviser and general monitor for a good many years. He is a sort of cousin of Jim's, you know, and we are absolutely devoted to him. He is by no means rich, but he has enough to live on very decently. However, it is of course important that he should marry money, for he'll never make any, and he really owes it to his name and all that."

"And so you know all about him, and can answer for him?"

"My dear, he would be perfectly willing to have any one answer for him on any subject. He has been asleep all his life, excepting when he has been away hunting big game. If I suggest that he marry Barbara (as, to tell you the truth, I have already done, tentatively), he will doubtless do so at once in the most delightfully well-behaved manner. But although he expects to marry her, or some other equally desirable

heiress, I really believe that if it is she he will do it with pleasure as well as grace."

"Well, I should think so," snapped Mrs. Chichester. "He will be a lucky young man."

"Of course you mustn't breathe a word of all this to her, or she will dislike him on principle. We must arrange it very carefully," said Lady Hylliary. "He has infinite faith in my judgment and taste. I shall bring him round directly he returns from a short visit which he insisted upon making somewhere up in Massachusetts. Then you can judge him for yourself."

Mrs. Chichester sighed and smoothed an invisible wrinkle out of her gown. All things being equal, this would be such a pleasant solution of her difficulty, mentioned or mentionless. Then she spoke again.

"And now, Janet, will you talk to Barbara for a little while and see if you can get her to give you an explanation of her extraordinary conduct? She is a very truthful person, and, if she speaks at all, you can believe her implicitly. This last time she had been away for ten days, and her father is terribly worried as to what may have happened: probably nothing dreadful has, but at the same time it would be a relief to Jack to know definitely that he has no need to

worry. Tell Barbara you will keep the details of her confidence to yourself, if she wishes."

"Haven't you the remotest idea of where she has been?" asked Lady Hylliary. "Not the least suspicion?" Again she had felt from her sister's words that Jack's information and Adele's were not identical.

Mrs. Chichester's jewelled hand trembled slightly as it rested on the little polished table before her, but after an almost imperceptible hesitation she answered firmly,

"No, not the least."

"Well, it's an awfully otten job, but I'll try," remarked Janet. "Send for her now."

Mrs. Chichester rang and presently the butler appeared.

"Here is the key to Miss Barbara's apartments," she said. "Please unlock the door and conduct her here at once."

The old man left the room noiselessly.

"I shall speak to John after dinner this evening, and tell him a little about what a fool he is to treat the girl so," said Lady Hylliary. "For a clever man, he certainly does the most asinine things at times.

And as for you, I don't understand why you permit it!"

She turned to examine a large photograph, framed in rhinestones, which stood upon the mantel-piece. It was a picture of a girl with a beautiful, though somewhat wilful, face.

Mrs. Chichester watched her. "Ah, you've never seen that, of course. I didn't send you one, as I know you hate photographs, and won't have them about you."

"Not a bit like either of us, though we were both more than ordinarily good looking. But even a photograph can't spoil her — she's utterly handsome," remarked her aunt.

At this juncture the aged butler reappeared at the door. His face was blanched of its natural ruddiness, and his eyes were wide with fright. For a moment his agitation was so great as to prevent his speaking.

"Lang, what is the matter?" asked Mrs. Chichester, with a gasp of fear.

"The door was locked as usual," whispered the man, "but the rooms were empty: Miss Barbara has disappeared! There was this note on the table," handing an envelope to his mistress.

Adele opened it with slow and thoughtful precision, which Lady Hylliary noticed in astonishment; there was more in this than Adele had disclosed to her, or to her husband, either, decided her quick-minded ladyship. After reading the note through, Adele handed it to her sister, who read:

MOTHER DEAR: I am sorry, but I cannot be made a prisoner like this, and I am going to my friends again. Tell dad not to worry about me, and to trust me to take care of myself. I shall let you know, soon, where I am — or come back.

BARBARA.

IV

TOUCHES THE DRAMA

IN THE Berkshire Hills spring had set her snares in so alluring a fashion that, as though drawn by an irresistible magnet, Cecil started out next morning along the same road which he had traversed the day before.

Self-deceit had never been one of his characteristics, and after a restless, wakeful night of thought, he made no attempt to disguise from himself the very decided interest which the girl of the pool had aroused in him. And so, steadfastly refusing to accompany Prescott to the market town, he determined on a morning ramble, hoping to come upon her by the wayside, or at least to learn of her from some chance acquaintance. He had forborne questioning Samuel regarding her, from fear of his friend's sharp scrutiny and probable ridicule. But a few well-directed inquiries to a stranger might elicit much satisfactory informa-

tion. And so resolved, he set out at once to seek it.

The weather was somewhat cooler than it had been during the last few days, but the sun shone brightly and a slight breeze gave life to the atmosphere. Cecil strode along briskly, lost in pleasant meditations and dreaming such dreams as come of springtime and woodland encounters; but the local village was reached without his having met any one at all, and, although he idled about the town for a good half-hour, he could not bring himself to address any of the supercilious farmers and village folk whom he saw, far less to fall into conversation with them. He felt that if they knew her he would resent it, and that, if they did not, he would call them blind idiots. The purchase of a perfectly unnecessary can of tobacco at the store did offer a conversational opening, but the store-keeper recognized him as "that durned English lord-feller what's livin' up to Prescott's" and, as such, treated him with aggressive equality, not to say rudeness, just to assert the Yankee indifference to such presumptuous nonsense as a title.

This course of treatment did not tend to encourage confidences, and Cecil left the store no wiser than when

he entered it, except for a new note on the American attitude toward the British.

Passing the outskirts of the village, which in sooth were short enough and quickly left behind, he came to a house which had attracted his transient notice on his previous walk. It was a square, old-fashioned building, with overhanging second and third stories, and a gray-shingled roof. The house itself was painted white with green trimmings, as was the picket fence before it. It had a delightfully spick-and-span appearance for all it was so ancient, and the garden was an orderly riot of blossoms. Never had he seen flowers in greater profusion. The beds fairly overflowed with them; they flung themselves against the privet hedges on either hand; and over the narrow stoop with its twin seats, cushioned in red, flamed a crimson rambler, while against the walls grew honeysuckle and morning glory in a tangled mass of loveliness. The flowers grew as if in gratitude to a loving heart, piling up beauty upon beauty in their eagerness to please. And all this in a space not more than thirty feet square.

But best of all was the mistress of the place. She was a fat woman, well past middle age, clad in a gown

of flowered chintz and a large brown apron. She wore a huge white sun-bonnet on her head, and massive, yellow, gardening gloves covered her hands. She moved among her flowers with some difficulty but great determination, weeding here, pruning there, and eventually kneeling to transplant a border of incipient coxcombs. She worked as though she loved her flowers very much, howbeit she was obliged to pause every little while and wipe the perspiration from her large pink face with the apron, while she panted for breath. A more motherly soul could not well be imagined, nor kindlier seeming. He liked her at sight, and as he stood looking over the gate, watching her, while she, unconscious of his presence, persevered with her task, he thought of how his favourite hero in fiction had stood at such a gate before such a garden while a very different sort of female worked with gloves and trowel; and by the very force of contrast between the two women he half unconsciously uttered aloud the words of the book:

"How do you do, aunt. I am your nephew, David Copperfield."

At the sound of his voice the fat woman dropped the trowel in amazement and turned toward him.

"Laws sakes!" she cried in a mellow voice. "I thought at first I must a' been dreaming. How did you ever come to say that, young man?"

"Really, I scarcely know what made me say it," he replied pleasantly. "It just came. Perhaps because the setting is so perfect."

"Aha! one of the profession, I see," said the fat woman, beaming with pleasure; "staying around these parts on a vacation, I suppose?"

"Well, yes; in a way," replied Cecil, smiling.

"Well, well, don't explain les'n you wish," she said good humouredly, returning the smile. "To think of your recognizing me from the Betsy Trotwood part, though! And me grown so stout since leaving the stage, too. My, my! Won't you come in? Lew, he'll be real glad to see you; he always does enjoy seein' folks that remembers us. You'll see he ain't changed so much as me."

"Thank you, I shall be delighted to come in, if I may," replied Chamboyne. "What a lovely garden you have!"

"Yes, it is nice," said his hostess cheerfully. "D' you know when we were on the road all the time doing the big circuits, I used sometimes to see places like

this, and my! didn't I wish they were mine! Always wanted to buy 'em, and although now we've been living here for years, just as comfortable and cosey as can be, sometimes I can't scarcely believe it's true." She laughed like a pleased child and stooped to rub her knee. "'Cept when I've been kneeling on the damp ground too long," she added with an appreciative chuckle.

Cecil, scrutinizing her face as she spoke, saw that she had once been very pretty. Her small and delicate features were submerged in a very ocean of flesh, and the once dimpled little chin was now merely the starting point from which half a dozen others more ample rippled down to her broad, white collar. But, despite her great bulk, she was somehow not at all grotesque or repulsive, and with advancing years had retained, perhaps increased, her charm. Her blue eyes, which seemed small in comparison with the breadth of her face, but which were in reality of a very good size, beamed upon the world in uncritical kindliness.

"So you live here all the time now?" remarked Cecil, not wishing to commit himself by saying anything indiscreet, yet most fearfully anxious to learn more of this nice woman.

"Yes, ever since we retired. There's just me and Lew, and Kizah,– that's the cat. Once in a while some old pal comes to visit us, but not often. You see, it's kind o' out of the way down here. Then sometimes young folks comes to get a good look at what a *real* vaudeville artist looks like."

"And it is well worth the journey," he answered with a bow.

She accepted the tribute gracefully, and then puffed up the two low steps which led to the stoop.

"Just wait a see'," she said, "till I give Lew a call."

She thrust her head into the hallway and cried out in her throaty voice: "Number Eight! Oh, Number Eight! Number Eight on! That's the way we always call each other," she remarked in an aside to Chamboyne. "Of course, ours being such a high-class turn we was always put on number eight. Then the audience, soon as we were through, used to begin to leave, for there was nothing left on the programme but acrobats and such like. But they'd sit through any kind of nonsense to get our act. However, I don't have to tell *you* that!"

Cecil nodded, as that seemed sufficiently ambiguous, and the woman again called for "Number Eight."

"Guess he ain't in the house," she announced after a moment. "But he'll turn up in a short while, for it's most lunch time. You'll stay and eat with us, of course?"

He protested very faintly, nothing loath to remain. Life was becoming full of adventures! It was quite delightful.

"Let's sit out here on the stoop," said the fat woman. "I'll sit on this side and you'll have to take the other."

"Right! That will be pleasant," said he, and started to comply, pushing aside what seemed to be a tremendous bouquet to do so. His hostess gave a funny little scream and reached for the object.

"Gracious. My summer hat!" she panted. "My, you nearly sat on it!"

"Oh, I beg pardon!" exclaimed the earl, eying the monstrous creation with wonder. "No damage done, I trust?"

"No, mercifully, not a bit," she beamed, turning it about on her hand. "How do you like it? I bought it this morning from the peddler girl."

"*The peddler girl?*" cried Cecil.

"Yes, ain't you ever seen her?" asked the ex-actress. "But I forgot you're a stranger around here."

"Who is she?" he asked eagerly.

"Why, she's a girl who drives about selling millinery and needles and thread and ribbons and such like. Strange girl — sort of gypsy. I like her, though, and she has a fine taste in bonnets."

"How long ago was she here?" asked Cecil peering down the road.

"This morning. Why?" queried the fat woman. Then she looked at him shrewdly. "Young fellow, you *have* seen the peddler girl," she accused.

Cecil, taken unawares, blushed vividly.

"You have me," he said simply, seeing that dissemblance was useless.

"Spoken to her?"

"No," he replied.

"Running after her, eh?"

Cecil was annoyed to find that he was blushing again.

"I have seen her twice, and she piqued my curiosity, that is all," he answered, with as much dignity as he could muster. "Does her regular route lie past here?"

She looked at him suspiciously before replying. Then she laughed.

"I ain't going to tell you, dear," she declared. "I don't know why I shoul l bother about a stray gypsy girl, but I'm not going to help set a handsome young man like you on her track! As a matter of fact, I don't know a thing about Lolli except that I have bought my summer hats from her these last two years. But somehow I feel sure she's a good girl, and having seen too many such get into trouble in my time, I'll keep this one out if I can."

He looked at her with surprise, wondering at her vehemence.

"Oh, but I say," he remonstrated, much hurt, "I don't mean any harm, you know!"

She gazed at him very earnestly for a moment, looking straight into his eyes. They were blue like her own, and honest to a degree. He was a very prepossessing young man, and she had taken an immense fancy to him. Furthermore, she was a good judge of character, and her instinct told her to trust him.

"Why, I believe you," she said at length. "Do you intend to do the straight thing?"

To his own immense astonishment he nodded his head solemnly.

"Well," she said, "I expect you mean it, and so I'll tell you something. She's going to pass through Lee this afternoon and stop at the house of a friend of mine, Mrs. J. T. Smith. There!" She sat back triumphantly.

"Oh, *thank* you!" said Chamboyne gratefully.

"You're welcome," she replied.

Cecil moved uneasily in his seat and automatically felt for his watch fob. At what time would she be in Lee, he wondered.

The woman opposite, who had observed his movement and gesture, laughed.

"You'll never succeed in your profession if you don't learn to control your features better, young man," she teased. "Never fear, you'll get to Lee time enough after lunch. She won't be there before five, for she's going up to Jones's on top of Bald-headed Mountain first. So forget her for a while and tell me, is my hat becoming?"

Gravely she untied the strings of her sunbonnet and laid it aside while she tried on the monstrous concoction of lace and flowers, and turned about

for his inspection. It was a wonderful and fearful picture that she made, but when she took to giving him an imitation of an Irish cock on Easter Sunday, he applauded boisterously and sincerely, for the performance was inimitable.

In the midst of it a man appeared in the doorway. He was a tall, thin individual, with lean blue cheeks and heavy black brows. A shock of gray hair, worn rather long, covered his head, and his deep-set eyes glowered out upon the world dramatically. It required a second glance to assure the observer that he did not wear ruffles and stock, so perfectly would they have suited his appearance. But the long black coat which draped itself loosely upon his lank figure was in keeping with his *tout ensemble*, and as he leaned against the lintel, posing instantly on catching sight of the visitor, he looked every inch the traditional actor of the old school.

"Ah, wife, who is our honoured guest?" he inquired in a deep and resonant tone, waving a thin white hand toward Cecil in cumbersome jocularity as he spoke.

"Why, dear me, Lew!" exclaimed the lady, "where have you been? I called you quite a spell ago! This is our young friend, and I guess I may say without

vanity, admirer, Mr.— Mr.— why, goodness me! I've never so much as asked your name, young man."

"Cecil Fitz-Williams," supplied Chamboyne.

"Fitz-Williams," murmured the fat woman. "Afraid I never heard of you. But perhaps you haven't been on the stage long? Well, Mr. Fitz-Williams, *Mr.* Protheroe!"

"Honoured; delighted," said Cecil bowing.

"Ah! a member of the dear profession?" declaimed the ex-actor. "It is a pleasure to meet you, sir. You must not feel offended or disheartened that we do not know your name: is it real or stage?"

"I beg your pardon?" said the earl inquiringly.

"The name; is it your own?" said Protheroe.

"Oh, yes, indeed," said Cecil.

"But you have another one — the public one — perhaps?"

"Well, yes," replied Cecil, at a loss, "some people call me Chamboyne, you know."

"Ah, yes; of course," said his host vaguely. But it was evident that this name conveyed no more to him than the first one had, and that he merely assumed a familiarity with it in order to spare the vanity of this unknown player.

"Are you in the legitimate or a sketch?" asked the comfortable Mrs. Protheroe, primping her hat diligently.

Cecil felt he was being forced into a false position from which he must extricate himself at once, if at all. But the deception seemed harmless enough, and he was loath to disappoint the two by any disclaiming of the character which they had put upon him, so he essayed the more amusing course of maintaining it.

"Ah — oh — that is, not the legitimate," said he reproachfully. "I wouldn't do *that*, don't you know."

Protheroe smiled on him benignly at this and asked, "What is your specialty?"

"Shooting," Cecil replied promptly from force of habit, and then blanched with fear of having made an irreparable blunder. But his terrors were needless.

"Ah! Exhibition shooting. Hum!" said Protheroe. "Not quite such a high-class act as ours used to be, but creditable enough in its way. Still you could hardly call it acting, could you now?"

"No, indeed," said Cecil humbly.

"Why, Lew!" cried Mrs. Protheroe. "That's not a polite thing to say to the young man after his walking out to see us because of admiring our act,

and having such a respect for the old school. Just think, although he must have been quite a small boy when he saw it, he recognized me from the Betsy Trotwood part, and me grown so stout, too!"

"Well, my dear," replied her husband, "there's few that ever saw you in the part that could forget you, stout or no. And as for Mr. Fitz-Williams, he will, I am sure, forgive a rudeness which he must feel certain was unintentional. And now, if it is ready, perhaps he will share our frugal repast."

Cecil renewed his thanks and acceptance, and Mrs. Protheroe, gathering up her gloves, hat, and sunbonnet, led the way into the wide, cool hall, remarking as she went:

"Ready in a moment, gentlemen, but not frugal. Oh, no, not with my appetite; and I dare say Mr. Fitz-Williams will feel the same after his walk."

The earl followed, wildly curious to know who these impossibly delightful people were.

Left by himself for a few moments, he had the opportunity of glancing about him and striving for some clue to the fame of his hosts. Nor had he far to look. The walls of the hall in which he stood were covered by an array of flaring posters, heralds of the vaude-

ville troupe, and on them in gigantic letters which threw the names of the lesser lights below into practical oblivion, was printed:

MR. & MRS. LEWELLEN PROTHEROE

The Marvellous Impersonators of
Characters from Dickens's Novels.

Chromos of variegated size and hues displayed the two as *Little Dorritt* and her grandfather, as *Mr. and Mrs. Squeers*, and the *Veneers*. In the sitting room were many photographs of the retired artists, in and out of character. In most of these Mrs. Protheroe appeared as a slim and very pretty young woman; but the character of *Joe*, the crossing sweeper, was perhaps the most appealing, for in it her charmingly rounded limbs were visible through the tatters of the boyish costume, and her eyes, accentuated by cosmetics, were cast upward in a winning and pathetic manner. There was also a very pretty picture of her as *Dora* in "David Copperfield," in which she was dressed in a high-waisted gown and beribboned bonnet and looked quite like a doll. There were funny pictures of her, too, among which were notably *Cherry Pecksniff* and *Betsy Trotwood*, in which she was trans-

formed, and which seemed to Cecil to be marvellously exact in their interpretation of these characters. Some of the portraits of Mr. Protheroe were no less interesting, and as *Nicholas Nickleby* he was as handsome and attractive as he was repulsive and terrible in the impersonations of *Uriah Heep* or *Scrooge*.

"By Jove! if they could act this must have been ripping," murmured Cecil as he looked them over.

Framed clippings from newspapers also adorned the walls of the sitting room, and testified that the acting of the Protheroes was unsurpassed; if one believed these, the conviction as to their subjects' abilities was complete. Programmes with the Protheroes' names upon them, and bearing the insignia of theatres both English and American, and dates ranging back thirty years or more, hung about in neat passe-partout frames and on every hand were tokens which spoke of the owners' profession. The furniture, too, was very odd, no two pieces matching or even being of the same character. Yet each thing was interesting individually, and as a whole the effect was extraordinarily homelike and livable. One of the decorations puzzled Cecil greatly. It was a large gilt picture frame big enough to have held a life-size portrait. It was empty,

however, and inside its gorgeous boundaries hung sundry small prints and photographs. He was just wondering what its reason for existence could be when his host appeared with the announcement that luncheon was ready.

"I see you are admiring the Frame," remarked Mr. Protheroe in Pecksniffian tones. "It is very rich, is it not?"

"Very, indeed," replied Chamboyne; "but why is it empty if I may ask?"

"Ah!" said the ex-actor, "the answer is obvious: we have never been able to find a picture worthy of putting into it!"

"So you bought just the frame?" asked Cecil.

"Exactly. In a decorator's shop," was the reply. "My wife and I admire it greatly. Why trouble to add a picture?"

"Why, indeed?" echoed the earl, and decided mentally that the rest of the furniture must have been procured upon similar impulses.

After a meal of fried chicken, salad, waffles, and chocolate, which was consumed during a most pleasant conversation, and further enlivened by many interesting and amusing reminiscences on the part of the

kind host and hostess, Cecil took a half-reluctant departure, accompanied as far as the gate by them, where instructions for reaching Lee were given him.

"You walk straight on a spell, till you come to a place where three roads meet. The steep one goes right up Devil's Mountain, the middle one goes over to Babylon, and the one to the left is the one you want," Mrs. Protheroe told him, and then, lifting his cap, he bade them farewell, promising to return soon.

Cecil had not walked far before he came upon a wagon drawn slowly along by a pair of stout horses, and piled to a terrific height with new chairs such as are used for furnishing piazzas, and which were painted a bright red or green. As the wagon moved they creaked mightily, straining at the clean, new ropes that bound them. At the very top of this swaying load sat a wizened little man who drove the team while lounging very comfortably in the corner of a luxurious wicker sofa.

"Hello, stranger!" said this individual drawing rein at sight of the earl, and speaking in a nasal voice. "Hev' a ride."

"Thanks, I will," replied Cecil, who none the less

looked somewhat doubtfully at the height of the proffered seat.

"All right, sonny, jest step on th' armcheer, an' then ter thet leetle table, an' then on to th' settee. Thet's ther way. All right? Git 'ap, Joe! Git 'ap, Emily!"

And so encouraged, the patient horses started forward again with the additional burden.

"Travellin' fur?" asked the old man.

"To Lee," responded Cecil. "About six miles, isn't it?"

"Nearer eight," replied the other pessimistically. "Stranger 'round these parts, ain't ye?"

"Yes."

They fell into some desultory talk, and the chair peddler accepted a pipeful of the superfluous tobacco which Cecil had bought that morning. Smoking proved a sort of lubricator to the old gentleman's taciturnity, and presently he broke into querulous confidences.

"Seemed like I never *should* git started out ter-day," he began. "Certain ter goodness, onc't a woman gits buyin' things there ain't no stoppin' her!"

Then as Cecil only nodded his head sagely, without removing his pipe, the other continued;

"Here I says this mornin' ter Mira Jenkins (thet's my wife), I jest gotter git ter Lee this afternoon by four o'clock ter see that noo hotel feller about some cheers. Sure's I don't git there, bein' a day late already, some other feller'll git the trade. An' no sooner wuz I tru a-sayin' it than up comes th' peddler girl with thet crazy leetle wagon o' her'n, an' Mira got thet took up with buyin' stuff offen her thet what with their palaverin' an' talkin' over styles, I didn't git a blessed mouthful ter eat till come near ten o'clock. An' look at the distance I got ter go yit!"

"Peddler girl!" said Cecil carelessly; "what an odd occupation for a girl; but I suppose she is really an old woman, eh?"

"Old, nothin'!" snorted the man. "She ain't nothin' mor'n a baby, an' purty es one of these here soap advertisements yer see down ter th' stores!"

"And who is she?" asked the earl.

"Oh! Fer as *thet* goes," the man replied, "she ain't nothin' but er gypsy girl thet sells bonnets an' seeh like trash. She comes along in th' spring most generally, an' my wife buys stuff from her. 'Most

everybody 'round these parts knows her. She gits a purty good trade, I guess."

"Is she always lone — no husband?" asked Cecil.

"Great Sam Hill, no! She won't even look at any o' th' fellers," said the chair vender. "Yer jist oughter see her freeze' 'em when they git fresh! By heck! but she's got a high 'n' mighty way when she wants! But she's real kind, too, ter all th' children, an' every one thet treats her square. An' the women folks is jest plumb crazy about her."

"And she stays with the other gypsies in winter, I suppose?"

"I dunno. Mebbe she does," said the man. "I ain't never seen her with none, though."

"Hum!" said Cecil. "Know anything else about her?"

The man gave him a sharp glance and answered, "No," shortly. Cecil felt at once that the peddler was intentionally resenting his interest, and had for some reason determined to say nothing further of the girl. Had all the country side elected themselves her guardians? It seemed quite possible; and when he recalled her winsome sweetness he felt sure that such was the case, and that further questioning would

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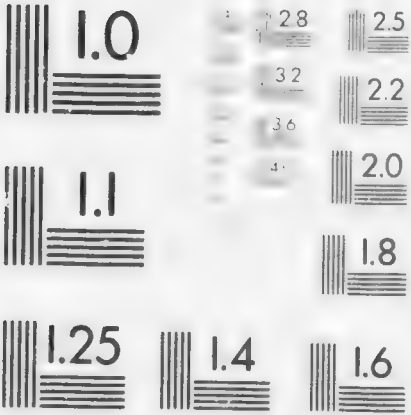

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be misunderstood. So he switched the conversation back to its original subject: to wit, the sale of chairs.

"You do a pretty good business?" he inquired.

"Yes 'n' no," replied the man. "I ain't hed cause ter complain none till this year. You see, thar's a young feller took up this route, an' he's bound ter hurt my trade some. Still, prob'ly it'll be good fer me ter hev' ter hustle a leetle; when folks gits ter my age they need a mite of somethin' ter make 'em keep up ter ther mark. Competition's a good thing fer the consumer, anyways," he chuckled dryly, and then added soberly. "I'd hate fer this new feller ter git J. T. Smith's trade."

"The hotel keeper at Lee?"

"The same," said the chair vender. "An' th' mean part of it is, I simply got ter go up Devil's Mountain an' git a horse an' buggy belonging ter my wife's mother; an' that's goin' ter delay me somethin' terrible. It's been left up there to a friend's, an' I got ter git it ter-night, or I'll hear 'bout it when I git home. Whut am I a-goin' ter do? Can't take th' wagon up; road's too steep. Can't leave th' wagon on th' road fer an hour while I walk up; 'tain't safe. An' even if I *do* take th' time ter do all thet, I'll miss seein'

Smith ter-day. I say, young feller, mebbe you'd like ter earn a quarter by goin' up Devil's Mountain fer thet horse an' drivin' him ter Lee fer me?"

Cecil smiled.

"Thanks awfully, but I can't," he said, "because the truth is I've got to be in Lee at four o'clock myself."

"Durn it! Ain't thet too bad!" exclaimed the man. Then he thought a moment, eying Cecil earnestly as he did so.

"I tell you what, sonny," he said at length. "You drive this wagon in ter Lee fer me, an' tell J. T. Smith, Eureka Hotel, thet I'll be right along; an' I'll go up the mountain fer the buggy. I won't pay yer nothin' fer takin' a free ride ter where yer was goin' anyways, but mebbe thet arrangement would suit yer?"

"Yes, it will suit me very well," replied Cecil, glancing at his watch, and considering the saving of time which the riding would mean.

And now they had reached the cross-roads described by Mrs. Protheroe, and the owner of the wagon descended, handing the reins to Cecil, who took them with a sudden feeling of appearing very ridiculous. Still, it was growing late, and he would make better progress in this fashion than afoot.

"Take th' road ter th' right," said his employer; "it's some lonesomer then the main road, but it's easier on th' cart, an' jest es short. Take good keer o' th' hosses, an' don't dally none."

"Never fear," called the earl, whipping up his steeds.

"Remember, J. T. Smith's, Eureka Hotel," the old man yelled, and, at Cecil's nod of comprehension, turned up the steep road to Devil's Mountain.

How any road could be more lonely than the one they had just traversed Cecil could not well imagine, for they had not passed a living soul. But the highway appeared dusty and shadeless, while the by-way was pleasantly cool and green canopied; so he willingly turned into the latter, letting the horses choose their own pace while he filled a fresh pipe.

Who would have imagined that he could ever have found himself in his present position? Not his customary friends and acquaintances surely. Perhaps least of all himself! But there he was, a peer of the British realm, unaccustomed to intercourse with any one beyond the circle of such persons as his inheritance had supplied him with, and little given to adventure-seeking by nature — right in the midst of

one — of a bona-fide Adventure, with a capital A! He was being employed by an illiterate old peddler, who was unconsciously assisting him in the earnest pursuit of a gypsy girl of whom he knew nothing save that she was lovely! He threw back his head and laughed at himself, the green wood echoing his mirth. And, furthermore, what had he told the good woman with whom he had lunched — the *vaudeville artiste?* He laughed again, and then sobered suddenly. What *had* he told her? Did he mean it? Yes, a thousand times, yes. But it was madness. No, it was not either, or if it was he was glad to be so afflicted. At any rate he could not help himself, for the madness, if such it were, had become a greater thing than he, and he must follow the gleam yet farther, to disillusionment, perhaps; but follow he must. Then he fell to dreaming again, and all thought of awakening to find the reality less lovely than he imagined slipped away.

Clad in rough tweed trousers and an old brown coat of Prescott's which he had picked up at random, and rather dusty from his tramp, he looked a very plausible proprietor of the wagon as he rode along slouched in the driver's corner of the wicker seat, and

nodded gently with the jolting of the springs. No one uninitiated would have guessed him to be other than the rightful owner of the outfit, so well did his appearance in the present costume fit the part.

The woods were intensely silent; scarcely a leaf stirred, and the birds seemed all to be taking a siesta. The deep sand of the ill-kept road deadened the sound of hoof and wheel, and the creak of the shining furniture resolved itself into a sleepy drone. Scarcely any signs of civilization were visible. A crude rail fence, fallen into decay and overrun with young vines, hedged the road on one side, and the woods flanked it on the other. Once the tinkle of an invisible bell betrayed the nearness of some straying cow, but he did not see her, nor any sign of the habitat of her owner. Overhead, the sky was turning to a deeper blue, and clouds spread their wide black shadows upon the hillside. The road was an intimate one, shut in and narrow, full of treasures of colour; tender, alluring effects of light and shade; redolent of warm, sun-burdened spring growth; perfumed with odours from the woods: and Cecil, giving himself up to his dreams, as he lay back lazily, his cap tilted over his eyes, laved his soul in the beauty of it all.

Suddenly a scream rent the stillness — a cry of mortal terror and despair. Cecil sat erect with a jerk and looked about him. There was nothing to be seen but the quiet road. Had he imagined it? Then came a second cry, and another; it was a woman's voice.

Lashing the surprised horses furiously, Chamboyne drove at a mad pace toward the turn in the road, from which direction the sound came. On rounding the curve he pulled up abruptly.

At the roadside stood the little canvas-covered cart and the sturdy pony, while on the grass near by the peddler girl was struggling desperately in the arms of an evil looking man.

V

TOUCHES TRADE

WITH an oath Cecil sprang to the ground and ran toward the place, tearing off his coat as he went. The man, who seemed by his rather fantastic dress to be a gypsy, was a great, hulking fellow nearly seven feet tall, with colossal shoulders and a dark, sinister face. At sound of Cecil's approach he dropped the girl, who fell on the grass half unconscious with fright, and advanced toward the Scotchman. As he approached, Cecil had the opportunity of gauging his opponent's points, and decided that the man was very strong, but unskilled, and, at the moment, carried away with anger and chagrin at the balking of his intentions.

"Come on you d — d coward," cried Cecil, "I'll teach you a lesson you richly deserve!" Then flinging down his coat he stood still and squared himself to meet the attack; and as he did so it flashed through

his mind that this was the first occasion he had had for putting to practical use the boxing lessons of his college days.

"Teach me, you *chuckkal* (dog)!" muttered the gypsy, bearing down upon him, and uttering strange oaths in an unfamiliar tongue. "Teach me, did you say?"

As the man came up with him, Cecil made a pretence of hesitating, and gave the appearance of intended flight, at which the gypsy rushed for him like an infuriated bull. Cecil dexterously stepped to one side and landed a full right-arm swing behind the gypsy's ear. The man, carried forward by his own impetus added to the force of the well-directed blow, reeled forward a pace and, staggering, fell to his knees. Quick as a flash Cecil was upon him in a vain endeavour to pin him to the ground. He might as easily have held a lion. With a single heave of the mighty shoulders he was tossed away. For an instant the earth, sky, and trees whirled about him in a mad kaleidoscopic maze, and then a mass of bowlders seemed to rise out of space and smite him. He felt the rough surfaces grate against his shoulder through the thin linen shirt, and a point of the stone against which he had been flung

had cut his cheek. The warm blood was trickling slowly down it. It was only by a miracle that he had escaped serious injury. Bruised and half blinded with sweat and blood he again found the enemy, who in the meanwhile had regained his feet at a bound. The Scotchman was tall and well made, but beside this giant he was but a small schoolboy. His superior skill was his only hope, and in that he put his faith, dancing about the gypsy, always on the defensive, but waiting for an opening. Suddenly the giant put his head down and went for Cecil in an attempt to clinch. These unscientific tactics were met by a lightning upper-cut on the jaw from Cecil's left which would have knocked out any ordinary man, but which, although it went home, did no harm! The huge creature seemed made of iron. The blow, however, had so occupied Cecil's attention that at last the gypsy succeeded in attaining his desire to clinch.

It immediately became evident that, while he was no boxer, he was an expert wrestler, and Cecil being slighter, and lighter, be it remembered, by a good thirty pounds, was at a disadvantage. For several moments they rolled about in the dust, snarling, twisting, savage as two wild beasts. Now the white shirt

was on top, now the velveteen coat with its jingling ornaments of silver, soiled and torn. Then by a spring Cecil scrambled free and stood erect, and instantly his antagonist was facing him again. Both were nearly winded, and covered with dust and bits of leaves and twigs.

"If I could *lel bonnek tute, het-avava tule!*" (If I could get at you, I would slay you) snarled the man, lapsing into Romany in his emotion.

And so saying he struck out again, landing on Cecil's left shoulder. In recovering he had the ill chance to slip slightly, and at that instant Cecil got in a full right-hand swing square on the giant's jaw.

The world seemed horribly quiet all at once, as Cecil stood looking anxiously down upon the prostrate and unconscious figure at his feet. The great form lay most wonderfully still; he had not known how still a man could lie. The velvet jacket with its gaudy trimming was torn and begrimed, and the silken belt about the waist was twisted all awry. The other clothing, which was commonplace enough, somehow took on a jaunty air to match the rest, even in its present disorder. The man's head was covered with a shock of greasy black hair streaked with gray, and

in his ears were small gold rings. Lying so, in the dust of the unfrequented, wild road, he looked not unlike a slain pirate in some childish picture-book.

"Good God! will he never move!" exclaimed Cecil at length; and stooping over, he was about to raise the man's head.

"Beware!" said a soft voice at his elbow; "he is only stunned."

But though he knew it was the girl, who had crept up beside him, he did not look around — such was his anxiety for his fallen foe. And it was well that he did not turn, for at that moment the gypsy's eyes opened and he made a movement as though to rise. Immediately Cecil was upon his chest.

"Are you beaten?" he asked.

Then for the first time a gleam of mutual understanding passed between the two men.

"By God I am, *Gorgio!*" responded the giant. At which Cecil arose and allowed the other to get to his feet.

"Then be off with you!" he commanded. "Make haste! And be glad I'm not taking you on to the town and handing you over to justice, as you richly deserve."

The gypsy obeyed, hobbling meekly to where a

handsome saddle-horse browsed by the roadside in peaceful company with the girl's pony. Once safely mounted, however, he took on another tone. Wheeling his horse into the road in the direction from which Cecil had come, he laughed softly, the action giving an extraordinarily evil cast to his face.

"Well, *Gorgio!*" he snarled, pointing at the girl, "take your *lubbeny!* But remember you've not yet settled score with Lasho Balormengro, the Hairy One. Curse you!"

With which dramatic finale he was off, cantering away amid a cloud of dust.

A gentle hand was laid on Cecil's arm and looking down he met a pair of wide-set, golden eyes.

"Oh, come!" she said; "you are hurt, your face is bleeding badly; let me dress it. See, you must sit here on the bank while I do so."

She spoke firmly, with a surprising vigour and sense of responsibility. She was quite mistress of herself again: only a slight nervousness, kept well under the surface, betrayed her recent shock.

"It's nothing," he protested, "a slight cut, that's all. If I could find some running water to bathe it in, it would soon be mended."

"I think there is a brook beyond that thicket," she replied. "Let us look."

By pushing their way through the ferns and briers for a few feet they came upon a clear stream of water which gurgled limpid and cool over a sandy bottom.

"How did you know there was water here?" he queried, surprised. "I should never have guessed."

"I know those things, somehow," she answered simply. "Now bathe your wound carefully, and I will return in a moment with bandages and liniment."

And she left him to the gracious, healing coolness of the water. The touch of it upon his hot head and hands was like a magic lotion, and when he espied her brilliant garments as she came through the bushes toward him again, he rallied sufficiently to smile her a welcome. Her hands were filled with small articles: scissors, plaster, a pink jar of ointment, marked "thirty-five cents" in pencil, and a roll of antiseptic bandage, also neatly priced. Evidently she had taken the things from her stock in the little covered cart. Seating herself on the bank beside him she opened the pink jar.

"Now sit still," she commanded in her mellow voice, which had a curious accent not unlike that of the

defeated gypsy man. "Don't move your head, nor mind if it smarts when I put this on. 'Twill be over in a minute."

Submissively he bent forward and acquiesced without a murmur. Incidentally, this gave him an excellent opportunity of looking at her closely.

She appeared to be very young, and was certainly wonderfully lovely. Her features were aquiline and finely chiselled, a straight, delicate nose, a small mouth with full red lips, oval face, and broad brow, under which were the beautifully placed large eyes. These were the most striking thing about her, though all her beauty was of an almost too brilliant type: they were gold, those eyes, a fierce, molten gold, in which the large black pupils showed strongly. Never had Cecil dreamed that eyes could be so vital. Indeed vitality seemed to emanate from her whole personality. Her skin, though tanned from exposure to the weather, was fine grained and very much lighter than is common with gypsy women, and her dark hair — she was bare headed — which hung over her shoulders in two heavy braids, was silky and naturally wavy. It was a brilliant head, and fitly crowned her lithe young figure. Her scarlet cloak fell off her shoulders, displaying a

thin blouse of spotless white muslin and many ropes of heavy ornamental beads. Her skirt was of gray homespun, and she wore a sort of moccasins on her feet. Cecil's temples throbbed with more than the fever of his wound, as her nimble fingers dressed it for him. She was even lovelier than he had remembered, and that sweet delirium which came over him whenever he thought of her was mounting to madness when she spoke, looking up at him shyly.

"I have not thanked you for your help," she said. "How could I? Such things are far too great for thanks. But you know that, too, I'm sure, and will understand."

"Who was the man?" he asked, confused, but grateful for the deep meaning of her words. "Was he of your tribe?"

"No! I never saw him before," she answered, as if surprised. And then after a pause she added somewhat reluctantly: "I am not living with any tribe at present. I travel alone."

"That does not appear very safe," he replied. "Do you think it wise?"

"Nothing has ever happened before," she replied.

trembling a little, "and perhaps never will again. There, you are done, sir; I hope it is comfortable?"

"Very, thank you!" he replied, touching the patch upon his cheek. "You are a fine doctor. But tell me, really, will you go on travelling by yourself after to-day's experience?"

"I must make my living," she answered, spreading her hands expressively.

"And you have no one to go with you?"

"No one."

"Why don't you have a good dog, then?" he asked, inspired.

"I'm afraid of dogs," she said briefly.

He gave it up in despair. She arose and gathered up her lapful of implements.

"We'd best be getting on," she remarked. "Where are you bound for?"

"To Lee," he answered, following her back to the wagon. "Can we travel together?"

"That is my road," she replied, "and I'd be glad to have you with me till we get out of this neighbourhood. You're Cap. Jenkins's new rival in the chair trade, aren't you?"

For the third time in one day a new rôle was fast-

ened upon him, and after an instant of surprise he accepted it gratefully. If she believed him to be a chair peddler, so much the better. He would not undeceive her unless forced to.

"I suppose I am," he replied, "though I mean him no harm, I'm sure."

"It's very mean of a young chap like you to come in and take an established route away from an old man like Cap. Jenkins, who's even afraid of his wife's mother. Are you getting any trade?"

"I haven't sold a chair to-day!" declared he truthfully.

She seemed somewhat mollified by the statement, although she said, "I'm sorry," and, climbing into her little cart, took the lead down the narrow road.

Cecil scrambled up to his lofty perch and started up his horses. The mode of procedure made any further conversation impossible for the present, and he fell to thinking what he should do. He could not let her go again now that he had found her. Who knows how far she might travel if he lost sight of her for another twenty-four hours? It was by the merest accident that he had found her to-day, for if it had

not been for Mrs. Protheroe's kindly belief in him he might never have learned of the girl's whereabouts. He was past analyzing his feelings for Lolli — for the present at least — and his sole idea was to remain at her side by one method or another.

From under the hood of her little cart there came a song with a minor tune, and words in that strange tongue which gypsies call Romany:

"Kekkomi, Kekkomi, miri chal,
Shall mande sal.
Shan's mulo!
Tugnio amande, Tugnio amande!"

(Forever, forever, my lover,
Shall I weep.
Thou art dead!
Woe is me, Woe is me!)

The dust from her pony's heels danced golden in the rays of the sun, and the melody floated clear above the jolting of the carts. The words were Greek to Cecil — and his heart seemed like to burst with sheer joy of living. She was so winsome and so kindly, yet so dignified; and the fading day was beyond compare.

Presently they began to approach the little town of Lee, as a broader road and a few scattered cottages indicated. Then a church spire showed above the

trees. Her song ceased. Chamboyne drew up beside her cart and asked:

"Have you business here?"

"Yes," she replied, "at the other side of town."

Then they drove along silently, past squalid shacks with numerous children playing before them — the homes of the employés of the paper mill which loomed ungainly and bleak upon the opposite side of the river which girt the town. Past trim homesteads then, of the better class of villagers; and next, right past the palatial mansard-roofed mansion of the mill owner, on whose lawn glistened a cast-iron stag painted in the natural colours. Then came the tidy village green with its whitewashed fence and square, uncompromising church. People stopped and stared at the peddler girl's gay cart, but here and there some friendly face smiled, and a welcoming hand was waved to her. As they turned into the main street of the place, on which were several shops of some pretensions, his eye caught the sign "J. T. Smith" over the hotel door. This, then, was his promised destination. In the distance he recognized the weazened figure of Cap. Jenkins stamping up and down the piazza impatiently. A brilliant idea came

to Chamboyne, and he leaned over to speak to Lolli:

"I have some business to attend to at the hotel," he said, "and then I want to be getting on to the next town. Will you be going too?"

"Yes," she replied, busy with her pony, "soon's I'm through at Mrs. J. T. Smith's."

Then it was to the inn she was bound! Of course! how stupid he was not to have remembered the name when the old man had given him directions. This rather complicated matters, for a triangular meeting with Daddy Jenkins would be awkward at this juncture. Still there was nothing for it but to run the risk.

Several farmers' wagons and buggies congested the street at this end, and the traffic was so arranged that her lighter vehicle went ahead, and, a station hack intervening between them, he had the satisfaction of seeing her drive into the side yard of the hotel and disappear into the house with a large bandbox in her hand before he drew rein at the front steps.

Daddy Jenkins's face on catching sight of him was enough to strike terror to a timid soul; but Cecil, strong in a newly made resolve, was unruffled.

"Yer good-fer-nothin, lazy varmint, whar yer ben?" shouted the old man, running down the porch and shaking a crooked finger at Cecil. "Here I ben settin' fer two hours waitin' fer yer, an' Smith, he got tired o' hangin' round an' wented ter ther city. Gosh durn it all! Whar yer ben, I say?"

"I must have lost my way," replied the earl, passing the reins round the whip and dismounting; "took the wrong turning."

"Took the wrong turnin', yer blame fool!" snapped the old man. "I'd like to know how thet's goin' ter help me any? Here I've lost a good fifty dollars' worth of business along of you, an' yer comes an' tells me yer *lost yer way!*"

The amount of sarcasm which he managed to impart to the last three words can scarcely be conveyed in cold print.

"Well, I'll make it up to you," said Cecil quietly; "come inside where we can talk for a moment."

The earl spoke with the impassive force of one who is accustomed to absolute obedience, and the "captain," despite himself, followed his employé into the ill-kept lobby of the hostelry, muttering nevertheless as he did so.

"Wal, young feller, an' how d'yer suppose you kin make it up ter me?" he inquired, when they were seated. "Don't suppose I'd take it out in service from sech a lunk-head, do yer?"

Suddenly Cecil roared with laughter. The idea of working for this shrivelled specimen of humanity struck him as immensely funny.

"No," he said at length, when he was able to restrain his mirth. "I want to know how much you'll take for the entire outfit out there," and he jerked his head in the direction of the open door.

Jenkins looked at him in amazament.

"D'yer mean you want ter *buy* it?" he asked incredulously.

"I do."

It was the old man's turn to laugh.

"Haw, ha!" he cried; "where's yer money, young feller?"

"I have plenty of money," replied his companion, bringing out a fat pocketbook. "How much will you take? Come now, I've a fancy for the business."

"Are you serious, hey?"

"Certainly," replied Cecil, taking some gold out of the wallet. He had fortunately procured quite a

sum in American money on landing, and was well supplied.

The New Englander's little eyes gloated over the yellow pieces. Then a suspicious look came into them.

"How did yer come by all thet thar money, young man?" he asked with an inquisitorial glance.

"It's part of my inheritance," answered Chamboyne readily enough. He was becoming expert at half-truths.

The old man still looked somewhat doubtfully at Cecil, and queried:

"What did yer say yer name was?"

"Cecil Fitz-Williams."

"It's rather a fancy name, to be an honest one," replied the peddler, "but yer money seems good. Did yer want th' team o' horses an' th' campin' outfit 'sides the cheers? An' th' wagon?"

"Yes, if you are willing," said Cecil.

Whereat they fell to dickering. But the earl was a poor bargainer and in the end the old man got more than his chattels were worth. There was a notary in the hotel, and the deal was soon finished. Cecil, with a sigh of relief, put the deed of sale into his pocket, and sent a telegram to Prescott.

Irresistibly detained. Will not be home to-night.

Through the window he watched Lolli get into her cart and drive off, first glancing about her, possibly, he thought with a heart throb, to see if he were about. Then, bidding Daddy Jenkins a fervent adieu, he took possession of his purchases and followed her.

At a turning of the road where the houses were becoming more scattered again, they came abreast, and he saluted her gayly.

"Are you really going on over the mountain to Gomorrah?" she asked, evidently not ill pleased.

"I am indeed," he answered. "How far would you call it?"

"It's a good twenty miles," she replied soberly, "and over the mountain at that. You can't reach it to-night. See, it will be dark in less than two hours, and with your heavy load it will take you six at least. The road is steep and very bad."

"I must get there at all events," he assured her. "They did not tell me it was so far, and I am a stranger about here, you know."

"Better have stayed in town," said she.

"Why does not the same reason fit your case?" he suggested.

"Surely you know well enough they wouldn't let a gypsy sleep in town! Not even me, whom they know to be honest," she said with a shade of reproach in her voice.

"What will you do then?"

"Oh, I shall camp in a grove I know of on the mountain side. You'd best do the same; it's too late to turn back."

"Thank you, I will," he replied with the grave courtesy of one who accepts a much coveted invitation.

"Sometimes I shudder at the thought of how much people live in houses," she said. "Just think — shut in from all this glory of air. Doesn't it seem strange that such a thing should be done from choice?"

He nodded.

"You're used to camping?" she then asked.

"Somewhat," said he, thinking of several African game camps, swarming with native carriers and servants.

They were silent for a while, riding out beyond the arm of cultivation, almost of civilization, it seemed to him. The sun had nearly set, and all about them was a crimson glow that touched everything like a magic breath, making a veritable fairyland of the coun-

try round. The hood of the canvas-covered cart was thrown back, and he could see her easily as he looked down upon her from his swaying seat. She was leaning against one side of the wall in an easy position, with her head thrown back and the reins lying idly in her lap. There was something mystical in her expression, something spiritual, despite the delicate sensuousness of her. Her face looked very calm and pure, like some great prophetess of old, and her big, golden eyes seemed to be looking at a distant vision. She possessed some quality that seemed to hold her aloof from ordinary mortals; a sort of sacredness, he fancied. It was easy enough to understand why she was safe with any man not an absolute beast. Her very trustfulness and intrinsic sweetness protected her. Then, too, her frankness and absolute acceptance of a pre-supposition that she would be fairly treated, put every one with whom she met on their honour, without her knowing it. "Of course, you are an honourable person," her look appeared to say: and who could then be other than she thought them, no matter what they may have been the moment before?

Who was she? Cecil wondered. What had she done

that her tribe had cast her out? Probably it was because she would not countenance their thieving practices. But whatever her story, he felt that she was one of those darlings of nature who, as Emerson says, are above the law.

VI

CONTINUES THE SAME, WITH ADDITIONS

THEY had turned into the mountain road now, rounding their backs to the violet plain and mounting single file into the last lingering sunlight higher up. The way was narrow and steep, and the road bed ill kept, with many loose stones scattered treacherously over it. The horses required all their attention, and progress was slow. Over all hung the peaceful weariness of closing day. Half-way up they came to a wooded strip which led along the edge of a ravine where it was almost dark. Her pony was startled by a flying creature crossing its path in silent-winged haste, and she gave a little cry: but when he came to her assistance she sent him back, saying she could manage very well alone.

It was more than an hour before they gained the little beechen grove on the summit, which was to be their resting-place, and the light was fading fast.

With wonderful dexterity she began making camp; and, taking complete charge, gave Cecil orders which he obeyed most willingly and to the best of his ability. It was arranged that he was to leave her the main camp, and pitch his tent a little way off, but within easy calling distance, and that they were to share their meal. On unpacking the kit which he found strapped under the driver's seat of his wagon he discovered blankets, some cooking utensils, coffe , bacon, a tin of biscuits, a tin cup and plate, and a steel knife and fork. With these he set about some clumsy preparations, after having built a huge fire over which she hung her kettle. For a moment she watched him smilingly.

"You had better let me do the cooking," she said at length, "and you go for more water."

"That's hardly fair," he protested; "I mustn't impose upon you!"

"Then I invite you to suppper," she replied gravely.

"Thanks awfully, I'll accept," he said, gratefully relinquishing his stores to her, and obediently going to the spring.

When he returned a snowy cloth had been spread upon the ground and on it were set out two enormous

blue cups, like the one he had seen on the occasion of his first visit to her amp, together with the substantial tea set. There was, further, a huge bowl of strawberries and a jug of cream, while from the frying-pan arose a most appetizing odour. Darkness had fallen and the fire cast weird, dancing shadows upon the surrounding blackness, but cheerily lit up the cosey arrangements in the foreground of the grove. At one side stood the little cart, its shafts on the ground, its curtains drawn.

"Come, sit and eat," said Lolli, indicating a place for him and seating herself opposite. "You shall have some *bollivas*, cooked to perfection."

She put some bacon upon his plate and filled the ample cups with tea. He ate ravenously, for the food was good, and the hour was late. She watched him over the top of her cup with the satisfied air of the successful hostess.

"These are the nicest cups!" he said greedily.

"Yes," she responded, "I like *plenty*."

Then they both laughed.

It was a very merry meal. They exchanged similar confidences over it, and became fast friends.

"And what is your name?" she asked in the midst

of the conversation, suddenly recollecting that she did not know it.

"Cecil Fitz-Williams," he told her; "a very fancy name for a chair peddler, is it not?"

"Yes; John Brown would serve you better in your trade," she made answer; "you are English, aren't you? You talk as if you were."

"I suppose I do," he assented; "I am Scotch, and I haven't been long in this country."

"Did you sell any chairs at the hotel?" she asked sympathetically.

"Not one," he admitted. "Mr. Smith was away."

"Oh! too bad!" she said. "I did well to-day — made five dollars. Have some more berries?"

"Aren't you afraid to tell me that?" he laughed. "I might rob you!"

"Oh, no!" said she, "you would not. It's only Balormengro's kind that do that!"

At mention of the strange name, again his curiosity was aroused.

"The scoundrel!" he said, clenching a fist at the memory of him. "How did you remember the name?"

"How could I forget it?" she answered in that curiously simple manner of hers.

"Tell me how it happened," he said shortly.

"He caught sight of me at South Stockbridge," she said narratively, "and followed me. I thought he had gone, and I had got down to fix Puck's harness when he came up. He spoke me ill, and — and — it was well you came in time. That's all."

Cecil swore under his breath.

"You should not go about alone," he said again; his tone was almost a reproof.

"Do not let us speak of it," she murmured. "Evil things past are best forgotten."

When the supper dishes had been cleared away they sat for some time talking by the fire. Soon she begun humming softly, and he asked her to sing again the song of the afternoon. Her voice was a rich and quite untrained contralto, but, as she sang, the night itself seemed to listen.

"What does it mean?" he asked, after a pause when she had finished.

"I do not know."

"Is it in the gypsy tongue?"

"Perhaps, I am not sure."

"And where did you learn it?"

"I do not know that, either. I seem to have always known it, or have heard it first in a far-off dream."

"It's very beautiful."

"Yes," she said.

There was a silence. Then:

"Can you not speak the gypsy language? You knew what that man said when he spoke in that strange tongue?"

She shivered, and drew her red cloak about her, although the night was warm.

"How does one know things?" she said in a low voice. "How does one know that one knows?"

Then she rose abruptly.

"Good night, Scotchman!" she cried lightly. "We will breakfast early, and take the valley road down there to Gomorrah."

And this was the beginning of their journeyings. For seven days they travelled together, peddling their wares by day, and camping in some isolated spot at night. She accepted his companionship without any display of emotion, neither repulsing nor encouraging it, and going her even way unmoved. She was a keen business woman, taking delight in her bartering, and

recounting her sales to him at eveningtide over their supper. Like all gypsies, she had a keen nose for a bargain, and to her regular trade she added fortune-telling of a sort which greatly amused the farm women who were her customers. Cecil was in a transport of happiness from morning till night — with its wakeful, restless hours, when he lay upon his bed of fragrant boughs and knew that she was near. His entire past with its associations had, for the moment, slipped away from him, and he thought and dreamed of nothing but this wild flower of a girl with her primitive gentility, her native grace and goodness, and her all-conquering charm.

As they travelled about he made no effort to sell his wares, and found not a single purchaser. He contented himself during the hours of her occupation with foraging the villages through which they passed for such delicacies as the place afforded; and when at night he confessed his lack of business success, she would condole with and encourage him, reproving him for his expenditures.

They went from Gomorrah to Sodom, and thence through Bethel, and on toward Barrington by the back-country roads, stopping at farms as they passed.

On the third night they camped in the Jordan Gap (a Quaker-christened spot, as are all in this neighbourhood), and Cecil, when they had finished supper but while it was still light, threw himself upon the ground in front of her to hear her sing, as she sat leaning back against a tall pine tree. The evening was fair, and a pale sickle-moon climbed the clear heavens. A poignant quietness was in the air, and the fire had fallen to a bed of glowing embers.

"Lolli, queen of the forests, tell me of your people: tell me of the gypsies," said he softly.

"The gypsy folk never tell of themselves," she replied in her slurred accents. "That is why they succeed in holding together, and why even those who have lived among them much know little of them."

"They have many signs and tokens by which they send each other secret messages, have they not?"

"Yes."

"Tell me some of the mysteries. I swear never to breathe them to a living soul!"

"They are not mine to tell," she said simply.

"But you must know some that you could tell me?"

She laughed a little at his persistence.

"I will show you something which is my own secret,

if you wish," she replied. "The gypsies all have what they call a *patterin* — a manner of showing what direction they have taken along a road, by throwing down some green thing, so that their friends can see it and follow them. Different families have different *patterins*. Mine is like this."

Reaching over she broke a twig from a maple sapling which grew near by.

"See, it is of maple," she continued; "three leaves on a twig, and laid so as to point the way. If I were in trouble the stem of one leaf would be broken — so!"

"How curious, how romantic!" he exclaimed. "Show me some more things, Lolli."

But she laughed and shook her head.

"Why do you peddle?" she asked suddenly. "You are educated, aren't you? You can read, I know! I think you could get steady work if you wished."

"But I like to peddle," he objected.

"I know!" she nodded, sympathetically, "So do I. Who would sacrifice this, all this"— sweeping her hand toward the view —"for the finest house or the most profitable employment? Indeed, what is profit but getting what you want? And both you and I

want freedom. We earn as much as we need to live, and are rich beyond measure."

"Right you are," he answered. "I agree with you entirely. But, Lolli, why are you so keen for a bargain or dicker, if you care so little for gain?"

"It is not the money, it is the battle of wits for which I care," she said. "Why does the artist care for his work? Bartering is my art."

"What do you know about artists and their work?" he asked quickly. "You do say the strangest things sometimes!"

"What do *you* know about artists?" she flung back at him.

"Precious little," he was forced to admit.

Lolli appeared to be an adept at almost anything which offered itself to her hand, and he could never guess what she would do next. She stopped a runaway horse one day, before Cecil, walking beside her, collected his wits sufficiently to take the job upon himself. The beast quieted instantly upon her touching it, and stood quivering but humble enough for the child driver to control, within five minutes of his capture. The occupants of the buggy to which the horse was attached were a middle-aged woman and her twelve-

year-old son, who held the reins. The woman was profuse in her thanks, but to Cecil's surprise, Lolli pretended not to understand English, and turned away as soon as she was certain that there was no longer any danger. Nor would she explain why she refused to receive thanks for her action, which, to say the least of it, had been a courageous one.

At another time he came upon her in the early morning engaged in mending a spoke in one of the wheels of her cart. She was making a remarkably neat job of it and would not let him assist for fear, as she frankly told him, that he might spoil it.

Theirs was a deliciously intimate life, yet a completely impersonal one. Lolli was abstract as the flowers themselves, and as natural. Pretence of any kind she could not abide, and in the face of her attitude toward the fact of their being thus alone, it was impossible to find anything remarkable in it. Two road-fellows, met by accident, and finding each other companionable, journeyed together. Why not? And "why not?" echoed common sense; for, after all, is this not in the elemental law of things? For that matter, if you like, both Lolli and Chamboyne were elemental beings; she, from whatever circumstances

had produced her in the first place, and made her possible; and he, from temperament, and in a way, by inheritance. Let Madame Grundy say what she will, this sort of innocent companionship existed, yes, under similiar circumstances, too, long before she was thought of. A plague upon the mischievous couple that gave her birth!

They were resting on the cool turf in a shaded little dell one hot noon-day, when a thin green snake slid through the grass at her feet. He expected that she would scream, or at least draw back in disgust, but, to his amazement, she leaned over and picked it up impulsively, as one would gather a blossom or leaf which had caught the eye. The creature did not writhe, but lay limply across her hand as if it were quite unafraid, and did not at all resent this sudden interference in its affairs.

"How pretty!" she exclaimed touching its back delicately with a gentle finger. "See the row of little dots!"

When she had released it, and it had slipped out of sight among the tall ferns, he asked, teasingly:

"Why are you afraid of dogs, when you have no fear for any other animals?"

She seemed to consider for a moment before speaking.

"I think it is because they are not *real* animals," she said slowly. "They are not really animals, and they are not really *human!* Man has spoiled them without succeeding in making anything of them. They are like a badly grafted tree, or an unsuccessful cast, and so they are merely abnormal. I hate abnormal things."

"I don't agree with you at all!" he cried hotly. "The dog is the noblest of animals; he is man's best friend!"

And here they fell upon the only stumbling-block which they found, and fought a battle royal, in which neither came out victor and neither was shaken in the least by the other's arguments.

When they paused at five o'clock, that she might brew some tea (which they did each day, much to Cecil's unexpressed delight), Lolli produced a book with a paper cover printed in brilliant colours, on which was depicted a lady in full evening dress, lying bound upon a railroad track, while an oblivious engineer was speeding his train at her full tilt.

"You read it while I get the tea," she suggested.

Cecil, who never read anything if he could help it, looked at the book with curiosity and announced the titles:

"DIAMOND DICKIE, OR THE DEMON DENTIST"

"That sounds as if it might be interesting," he said skimming over the pages, "though the pictures are most awfully rottenly drawn."

"Yes, they are not pretty," she assented, cutting bread and butter. "Please read!"

He complied, and for an hour they sat absorbed in learning how the wealthy dentist hid Dickie's sweetheart in the dental cabinet, and then attempted to assassinate her because she would not marry him, and how she was rescued at the eleventh hour and three quarters by her dauntless lover.

Lolli drew a long breath when it was over.

"What a lovely story!" she exclaimed. "I don't think I ever read a more thrilling one."

"Awfully exciting," he agreed; "but the dentist *was* rather a cad, wasn't he? I always did think dentists were horrid."

"Yes, they hurt," said she seriously.

"Where did you get the book?" he inquired, examining it.

"The grocer's boy at Gomorrah gave it me," she answered him. "He likes me," she added naïvely.

The same evening, after pitching their camp, they stood together in the moonlight and looked down upon the breathless beauty of a silver lake a thousand feet below. Through the pine trees the wind came, whispering strangely beautiful things to them.

"What a marvellous thing the wind is," he said in a low voice.

And she replied, "Yes, it is the breath of God."

That night as he lay staring up at the stars he determined upon a new course of action. Up to now he had carefully refrained from making any declaration to Lolli, or even intimating in the slightest manner the nature of his feelings toward her. It had seemed to him the only decent thing to do in view of the circumstances under which he had made her acquaintance and their present situation. But he was coming to the end of his tether: to-morrow he would speak and ask her to be his wife, but without forcing her to an immediate decision. That she would hear him out

without disturbance he did not doubt, knowing her character as he did; but as to the nature of her reply he could not even guess. She was kind to him, certainly, but she was that to every plowboy whom she met — nay, every dog — and she didn't like dogs! There was nothing which bade him hope except the fact that she had never shown any antipathy to him. At any rate, he would know his fate as quickly as may be. The thought of what this step might mean to his future, his position in the world, he brushed aside, refusing to allow it to trouble him. Lolli was good and beautiful and wise, and he loved her: what woman — be her station in life high or low — could offer more? Surely, that was enough. As for riches, he was learning what they were. And so he was resolved.

Late next morning, Cecil awoke and lay shivering in sweet anticipation. He listened intently, but heard no movement beyond the wall of green that screened her woodland chamber, so after a few moments he arose and made his way to the brook which was to serve as his bathing place. She had been there before him; he could trace her little footprints on the earthen banks. Then, after bathing, he leisurely returned to

the camp, and one here, stood stock still, surprised and angry. The place was empty, save for the smouldering fire. Cart and pony were gone; the ample cups and white cloth were gone; everything, including Lolli herself, had vanished as though they had never been. At first he could scarcely realize that it was true, but she had gone without a word, without a sign, and leaving no trace!

VII

REFERS TO A POSSIBLE SCANDAL

LADY HYLLIARY was sitting up in bed reading a letter. It was from Cecil, and at each period she shook her head in an angry manner so that her long diamond earrings (which she had carelessly forgotten to remove over night) rattled violently. The letter was brief and to the point.

GOMORRAH, MASS.

DEAR TOOTS:

I am very busy up here, and can't get away to meet the amiable Miss Chichester, as you desire. In fact, I have decided not to try for an heiress after all. It seems such a rotten thing to do. There will be no use, my dear Tootsie, in trying to move me from this: it's settled. Address me, care of post-office, Great Barrington, Massachusetts, if you must let off steam.

Your otherwise obedient

CISSY.

P.S. I am jolly glad there was such a rush at the docks that you didn't introduce me then and there to Mrs. Chichester and her daughter: I would rather meet them both without any *arriere pensée*, don't you know.

"I suppose Prescott has a sister," she said aloud, when she had finished. "But if he sees enough of her she will probably spoil it all herself, whereas, my interference would drive him into committing matrimony instanter. And what's all that gibberish in the postscript. He must have been thoroughly fuddled when he wrote. It's too bad, though! Hum!"

She had contrived to say all this aloud without dropping her after-breakfast cigarette from the corner of her mouth. The spacious but hideous hotel bedroom was littered up with an almost incredible jumble. On a table by the bed was a capacious tray containing the scanty remains of a very large breakfast: clothes were flung everywhere. It seemed as if Lady Hylliary must have deliberately thrown each garment on a separate article of furniture. The window shades were at different angles and the bureau was a mad tangle of false hair, cosmetics, and suffrage literature. Half a dozen copies of Lady Hylliary's new book, "Suffrage and Suffering," occupied one end of the sofa, each volume neatly tied up and addressed to a member of the American Anti-Suffrage League, with the authoress's compliments; while the bed itself was deluged with letters and papers. Her negligée was as

odd as her other costumes, being a brilliantly striped garment of silk, a relic of her Indian sojourn.

"It is really most annoying of Cecil," she thought, "after I'd promised Jim to get him settled too."

With which she dismissed him temporarily and unfolded a second letter. It was a long one in a delicate, feminine hand-writing.

"My Dear Lady Hylliary:

Although I am unknown to you, I make no apology for addressing you, because you are a woman who has violated all the domestic laws by speaking in public and in consequence may be considered as no longer having the right of choosing your correspondents. I wish to inform you that the United Mothers of America will open a most vigorous campaign against you, unless you promise to withdraw from speaking for equal suffrage at once. You are drawing into your net a number of hapless women, who are dazzled by your title and are converted to your cause merely on account of your social position and the unworthy advantage you take of it. I grieve to say that even several men (usually sane and rational beings) were quite carried away by your arguments last evening at Carnegie Hall, and seemed utterly unable to listen to reason afterward . . . ." etc., etc., — *ad infinitum.*

Lady Hylliary arose in her night-clad wrath and climbed out of bed none too gracefully. She was immensely tired of such letters, and endeavoured not to see them, but despite every order they still managed

to creep in among her personal correspondence. A Mrs. Jones was particularly obnoxious about sending them. Lady Hylliary was waiting to lay hands on that lady! With a bounce she brought her hand down upon the bell, and in a moment her secretary, a round young woman with eye-glasses, appeared.

"Send this woman a copy of my pamphlet, 'How to Be Happy though Married,' and mark the paragraph on 'Spite'," said her ladyship, handing her the letter. "Accept all the invitations whether they conflict or not, and refuse all the requests for free tickets."

She waved a hand toward the littered counterpane.

"Very well," replied the secretary, who shall be nameless because she was one of those persons whom you don't remember any the better for knowing their names.

"A Mrs. Smithson-Walker, secretary of the Home Club, an anti-organization, called to ask if you would debate with their president at what she called a 'pink tea' on Thursday at four. The subject is to be the vote."

Janet whistled meditatively.

"If I refuse they'll think I'm afraid of them," she said slowly; "and if I accept they'll be frightened and

won't show up. That's always the way with these homekeepers! Better accept the challenge, I suppose. And please send me Brown."

Brown was the maid.

Then her ladyship went to the dressing table and began to shake tooth powder out of her false hair spilled there by some careless hand, probably her own.

When she was arrayed to the despair of her maid and her own indifference, she had a taxi called and betook herself to the Chichesters' to inquire for news of her niece.

The day was very warm, with that sudden advent of summer peculiar to New York, and she soon removed the heavy cape which decorated her linen tailor gown, and opened a window. As she drove along her brow puckered into a frown over the still unsolved problem of the girl's disappearance. All efforts to locate the "friends" referred to by Barbara in her note had been fruitless, and no trace of the girl could be found. It seemed as if she had vanished into thin air.

The Chichester house was quickly reached, and mounting the marble steps Lady Hylliary was greeted by old Lang, who had seen her coming and opened the door before she reached the bell.

"Good morning, my lady," he mumbled delightedly at her smile of recognition. "Madame is upstairs in her own rooms. Shall I announce your ladyship?"

"No, I'll go straight up, Lang," she replied. "Any news of Miss Barbara?"

"None at all, my lady, I'm sorry to say," he replied.

Mrs. Chichester's private rooms were at the left of the stairs going up, and Janet, seeing that the sitting room door was ajar, called a cheery "good morning" from the top step. On entering immediately afterward she thought that she saw the figure of a man vanishing into the inner room.

"Oh, Janet, how you startled me!" exclaimed Mrs. Chichester coming forward to meet her sister, somewhat effusively. She looked pale, and had dark rings under her eyes.

"Hello, fair Odalisque, you look a wreck!" replied the visitor. "Was that my autocratic brother-in-law?"

"Where?" ejaculated Adele.

"That ran away from me."

"My dear Janet," replied her sister with a queer little laugh, "your imagination is so wrought up about the mythical wrongs of womankind that it is quite running away with *you*. There was no one here!"

This was so much nearer to wit than Adele usually came that Lady Hylliary laughed as she pulled off her gloves and opened her cigarette case.

"Pretty good, my dear!" she said, striking a match. "Lang says there is no news of Barbara; is it true, or doesn't he know?"

"Janet, I do *wish* you would not be so absurd!" continued Mrs. Chichester. "Of course it is true. Where are you going this morning?"

Lady Hylliary looked up in some surprise.

"Are you so anxious to be rid of me?" she asked. "I had come to see *you*."

"That is very sweet of you, dear, but you must not let me keep you from your many engagements," said the other hurriedly.

"Well, I'll be shot!" ejaculated Lady Hylliary inelegantly, sitting bolt upright: "Adele, what *is up?*"

"I am sure I don't know what you mean," replied Mrs. Chichester, pettishly. "There is nothing 'up,' as you express it, and I'm delighted to see you, of course."

Janet was ostensibly satisfied, for she said nothing more, but she glanced furtively at the portières which

screened the door to the next room. What did it mean? Could there be some mystery here? Her inquisitive mind was already burrowing rapidly among many possibilities. Unquestionably she would stay a while and see what would happen; there was no second door leading out of that inner room, she knew. She crossed her legs comfortably, and suddenly became conscience smitten. She was a beast! In all probability the man was Chichester, who was leaving after a quarrel to which Adele very naturally did not wish to confess. She would go shortly and leave her sister to the self-pity which Adele no doubt thoroughly enjoyed.

"But do tell me about Barbara," she exclaimed aloud; "surely there must be some word from her? Can't the detectives find out *anything?* Why it's two weeks since she left, or more. Adele, if I were in your place, I should be frantic! As it is I'm upset enough, goodness knows! You act as if it were the most ordinary state of affairs imaginable!"

"Janet, I *am* anxious," cried Mrs. Chichester miserably, "more so than you dream! But I am sure that if she had met with any mishap we should have heard of it by now. The only real comfort I have is that it's all been kept out of the newspapers!"

"Adele, for Heaven's sake don't cry until I'm gone," said Lady Hylliary, arising in haste. "I don't know whether it's you, or the heat, or my imagination, but *something* has got on my nerves most horribly this morning. I think I'll trot along and write a treatise on 'Self-Control': it may calm me."

Mrs. Chichester arose also — somewhat eagerly, Janet thought — and bade her good-bye.

"By the way," remarked the latter at the sitting room door, "I had a letter from Chamboyne this morning; he is held up in the country by something or other and won't be back for a few days at least. It's just as well, as things turn out, for if, as I sincerely hope, this absence of Barbara's is merely an escapade it is better that he should know as little of it as possible; nothing, if that can be managed."

"Janet," said Adele, reprovingly, "I really do not think you are justified in calling my daughter's disappearance an escapade; it does not sound proper."

"My dear sister, how you do love to shirk facts! I believe you would deceive the doctor in order to make him say you were worse, and then believe you really were!" said Lady Hylliary angrily, and left, slamming the door behind her.

On the stairs she met John Chichester coming up. He was in street clothes and had evidently just come in. Instantly all the vague suspicion which had possessed her a quarter of an hour since returned to her mind. If her brother-in-law had been out, it stood to reason that he could not at the same time be in her sister's inner room.

"Hello, Janet!" he remarked immediately; "are you in a hurry?"

"Not particularly," she answered; "why?"

"Because I should like to speak to you if you have time," he said gravely. "Will you come into my study?"

"Certainly," she replied, and then added anxiously, "no word of Barbara?"

The banker shook his head sorrowfully. "I wish to God there were!" he said.

Together they descended the stairs and entered the spacious room which served as sanctum for the head of the house. It was a dignified and simple apartment. There were the usual leather-covered chairs, and a great many books in open cases. A heavy table was placed before the three high windows, and on it lay writing materials and the model of an aeroplane. It was a rather austere room, and gave one much the

same impression of restraint which the owner conveyed. The banker was a large, smooth man, past middle life, sleek, and groomed to perfection. His features were ordinary, and he wore a small, gray moustache. Rather inclined to be fleshy and with a pleasing fresh colour in his face, he was sufficiently commonplace in appearance to have passed unnoticed anywhere. But once the observer met his eyes squarely, the first impression underwent a complete revision, for they were steel-gray and mirrored the mental machine which had made the Chichester millions possible. Withal he was a man to be reckoned with, and sometimes — to his own after distress — to be feared. Now he seated himself behind his desk — a habit he had of entrenching himself against the least familiarity — and turned a very grave countenance upon his sister-in-law. She thought that he had begun to show his age during the past weeks, and that Barbara's conduct was telling upon him heavily. She was his only child, and he loved her dearly; it was a pity that he did not understand her better!

"Have you been talking to Adele?" he asked of Lady Hylliary. "I supposed so: well, tell me, did you notice anything about her?"

Janet felt as though an electric shock had passed through her, but she managed to maintain a fairly unruffled countenance. Heavens! What did the man mean? Was there going to be a scandal?

"She seems very nervous," she replied cautiously, "which is only natural under the circumstances."

"It seems natural to you, does it?" said he; "well, why isn't she *more* nervous? That's what I'd like to know."

"Now look here, my autocrat," said Lady Hylliary tartly, "you must not expect too much of Adele, you know; she never was a person of very deep feelings, and she is probably rather put to it to appear properly broken-hearted about a thing which really only annoys her."

"'There are times when your levity is distinctly out of place," said Chichester flushing with irritation. "Still, I am forced to admit that there is some truth in what you say; it is this very indifference of Adele's on the serious subject of Barbara's disappearance of which I wish to speak.

"Perhaps I put it rather strongly," she replied, "but she certainly is behaving oddly. One would almost say she did not care."

"That's it!" he exclaimed, "she actually does not seem to care! Why, it's almost incredible, yet what else can I think? Look here, Janet, be decent can't you? I'm upset by this whole affair, and I want to talk it out!"

"Forgive me Jack," said the suffragette. "I'm sorry I was snappy; I'm as cut up about Barbara as can be, myself."

He looked at her gratefully, and then rising, began to pace back and forth across the room as he talked.

"Something very strange occurred the day before yesterday," he told her. "One of the men from the detective office came to make some further inquiries — useless trash enough, it sounded to me — just some minor details, *and she lied to him in the information she gave!*"

He stopped before Lady Hylliary and looked at her as though begging her to contradict him. As she watched him pityingly, she felt a pang of relief to think that the even more peculiar circumstances which she had just encountered had not come to his notice. In his last words, however, she found a new cause for alarm.

"*Lied* to him! Is she mad?" she gasped; "and within your hearing? Impossible!"

"She did not know that I overheard," he replied, "but I assure you I am not mistaken. Knowing very well that her suggestion that Barbara was visiting her friend Alice Worthing had been looked into by me, and that Alice told us that she had not seen Barbara for weeks, Adele actually made the same suggestion to the detective, rather insisting on its possibility, while she knew its worthlessness perfectly well. Can you conceive of a reason for such an action?"

"Not unless she wished to hinder the search," declared Lady Hylliary in a tone which was intended to put that possibility quite out of the question. Not so Chichester, however.

"Wait a moment" he said; "that is what I am at last forced to believe."

"To believe what?" she asked.

"*That Adele does not want Barbara traced!*"

Coming on top of her own observations and suspicions, this announcement fairly took away Lady Hylliary's breath. She shook herself and rose to go. Somehow she felt that she needed air.

"Nonsense, Jack," she replied. "It's all your fancy; you must have misunderstood." But even as

she said it they exchanged a look which proved that neither of them believed any such thing.

"And so she has never said anything to you which might give us a side light?" he asked, but without hope.

"No," she answered, "nothing. I don't understand it any better than you do."

As she drove away in her taxi, Lady Hylliary pondered upon the extraordinary situation in which she found her sister. That Adele had grown more and more selfish and shallow she knew; that she might have a plausible explanation for the presence of that man in her private apartments was possible; that she should lie was not strange; every one lies; but, that it should have been done in this connection was suspicious, and that she should not care about the return of her daughter was monstrous. Still, puny natures of that sort are often incapable of the most elementary feelings. Lady Hylliary puzzled over it greatly, and always, despite herself, came back to the retreating figure of the man who had hidden himself in her sister's room. Over this she knitted her brows furiously. As she approached the Colony Club, where she was to lunch, she roused herself and drew a long breath.

"Oh, these *home women!*" she said to herself enigmatically. And then composing her face into her "platform smile," as she called it, she alighted and entered the building.

It was about nine o'clock that evening when Chichester, having dined at the club with a group of men whose millions aggregated at least a hundredth of the wealth of the country, was walking home. It had been raining earlier, and he walked briskly in the fresh coolness. Just as he rounded a corner, a woman, walking rapidly in the opposite direction, brushed by him without appearing to see him; but, owing to her thick veil and the darkness, she passed so close to him that she almost ran into him, and a whiff of the perfume which she wore caused him to draw up abruptly. Surely—his wife's perfume! It was a peculiar scent, one which she had made up for her own exclusive use. He turned and looked at the woman sharply. She was not half a block away and walking hurriedly uptown; but there was no mistaking her shapely figure. It was Adele! She was clad in a dark, tailor gown and wore a small hat. Good Heavens, what did it mean! Mechanically he began to follow her, keeping

about fifty paces behind, his brain trying confusedly to grasp the situation. His wife, alone and on foot at this hour, hurrying along fugitively with every indication of secrecy. Where could she be going? and for what purpose?

No sinister suspicion of her honour and his crossed his mind, for in the many years of their married life no breath of criticism, far less scandal, had fallen upon her. True, they had grown somewhat apart lately. His increasing business responsibilities had more and more absorbed him, and much of his spare time was devoted to those organizations, political and charitable, in which he held official positions. He cared little for the ordinary routine social life, which was her principal interest, but they frequently went about together as a matter of form. As they grew older it was but natural that their interest should diverge to some extent; but while their relations even in private life were somewhat formal, she had never given him the slightest cause for jealousy, and although she was still young and handsome in appearance she had never indulged in the collection of young male protégés, which is not uncommon in such households as theirs. Beside all of which, John Chichester had long ago de-

cided what he would wish his wife's character to be, and had subsequently insisted to himself that it was such — a habit he had with both things and people, and which standard he maintained until the last gasp, whether it fitted them or not. If, as not infrequently happened, they failed to meet this standard so conspicuously that he was unable to deceive himself as to the facts, he always took it as a fall from grace rather than as a revelation of actual character.

Consequently, as he hurried along watching the woman before him, he felt no very clearly defined emotion beyond a considerable surprise, and a vague notion that it was all wrong, and that he must contrive to see the end of it. The thought came to him that he had better overtake and question her; or should he turn back, trusting completely that she would volunteer something by way of explanation on the morrow? But the memory of her strange behaviour regarding Barbara seemed to wipe out this possibility at once, and he continued to follow.

The streets were practically deserted at this hour, for the theatres were not yet out, and he had no difficulty keeping her in sight. Presently the black, mysterious mass of Central Park loomed ahead, and in

another moment she was crossing the arc-lit Plaza toward it. Dazed with astonishment, he did likewise, and soon found himself winding an intricate way through the darkness cast by the overhanging trees at the driveway entrance.

Turning sharply to the left at a little distance from the spot where she had entered the park, she chose a path leading to the small lake, and he had to quicken his pace in order to keep her in sight. The row of benches near the gate had been well occupied by lovers and idlers, but here the seats were more scattered, with wide dark spaces between them. Adele kept straight on with the occupied air of one who has a prearranged destination, glancing neither left nor right in spite of the darkness and comparative desolation of the place. Where was she bound for? Then came an awful thought. The lake! Good God! she could not mean that! No, no! With the fear clutching at his heart that she had lost her reason and was about to destroy herself, he broke into a run in order to overtake her; but at that moment she disappeared round a second corner.

When he arrived at the spot where she had vanished he could at first see nothing. Slowly, however, as

his eyes became accustomed to the intense gloom, he saw her standing on the opposite side of the wide quadrangle on which the path debouched. She was in earnest conversation with a man whose appearance he could scarcely determine, so deep was the shadow in which they stood. Even at the short distance which separated them from Chichester he was unable to catch more than the murmur of their voices, they spoke in such low tones. He stood and watched. After a moment his wife seated herself on the only bench the place afforded and the man followed suit. Once she put her hand to her breast for an instant, but otherwise sat motionless, apparently deeply interested in the conversation.

His first impulse was to speak to them, but on second thought he turned away with a queer catch in his throat.

It was an hour later that Chichester tapped lightly on the door of his wife's room. He had only just returned from a long aimless ramble during which he had decided to see Adele that night, and give her the opportunity for a voluntary explanation. With this idea in view he had slipped into a lounging coat, and

lighting a cigar went to her rooms. She answered his knock almost immediately.

"Why, Jack," she said in pleased surprise, as soon as she saw him. "Come in! This is an unexpected pleasure."

She was clad in a loose wrapper of pale-coloured silk, and her hair was in disorder. She tucked up a few strands with self-conscious fingers. At her age one must be so careful.

"I thought I'd run in for a moment to say 'hello,'" said he with an assumption of jocularity.

Mrs. Chichester looked about her nervously as she patted a cushion into shape and placed it in an easy-chair. What was she searching for? he wondered.

"Sit down, dear," she said smiling; "did you dine at the club?"

"Yes, it was a committee dinner. What did you do?"

He watched her narrowly as he said it, and his heart failed him as he noticed that she changed colour.

"For once, I stayed at home," she replied. "I was determined to rest, for I am all tired out with worrying about Barbara, and trying to keep up outside appearances so that no one will suspect that

anything is amiss. So I just lay quietly on the sofa and read."

"That was sensible," said he pleasantly; but he was not convinced. Her account of how she had spent the evening, in the face of what he had just seen, was farcical. Yet was she really lying? He peered into the bedroom to see if any incriminating evidence in the way of outdoor garments was about. There was nothing. Was it possible that she spoke the truth? Maybe; but no, he could not so easily doubt his own senses. Surely it was she herself whom he had followed! It was like a nightmare. He was sure she was lying — and yet ——

"Good night!" he said shortly, interrupting her in the middle of a sentence, and rising to go.

"Oh, Jack!" she said plaintively, drawing down the corners of her mouth in that tremulous, pathetic way she had. "Oh, Jack, don't go! I so seldom have you to myself!"

He looked at her unsteadily for a moment, and then hardened his heart and turning heavily away, went out, closing the door softly.

VIII

INTRODUCES A MAGIC SIGN

IN THE first flush of that day on which Cecil had overslept and had awakened to find Lolli gone, his Lady of the Wood and Field opened her eyes, and with the vigour of her healthful years arose at once and took her way down the sun-spattered path and across the dusty white road to where the river ran, cool and secluded, between thick ranks of willows.

A pair of yellow birds were there before her, splashing and chirruping noisily in the sandy shallows, scolding, spluttering, and making a most tremendous fuss about their morning bath. They did not leave at her approach, nor did the little chipmunk which foraged for his breakfast along the bank desist from his occupation, but after a single glance at her from his round, bright eyes, went on busily, confident and unconcerned by the presence of one as native there as himself. A kingbird winged his way noisily to

a branch above her head, seeming to choose one in her proximity with intent. For a moment she answered his throaty calls, and then, slipping off her garments, dropped into the deep, clear waters of the stream.

The world was wrapped in a dew spangled robe of gossamer, a thin elusive drapery, like the jewel-heavy garment of some ancient princess. Here in the valley thicker shreds of fleecy cloud hung above the river, or were driven through the trees by the growing sunshine, over stubble and sage, up, up, through the pines and spruces, until at length they joined their pink sisters above the mountain tops. Green river things, growing at the water's edge, swept their slender fingers through the current as she passed, swimming slowly on her side, a gleam of opal white below the crystal surface. Where a columbine overhung the stream — a tiny dancer in red and yellow — she paused to pluck it with her wet, pink hand, startling a field mouse as she did so. It ran a yard back among the grasses, and then, turning, stood still to watch her with emotionless black eyes.

"Come closer, O timid heart!" she said in her sweet guttural.

But the mouse stood still, her little body palpitating wildly.

"What dost thou fear, O sister?" she asked very softly; and made an odd little sound in her throat.

The mouse grew rigid at the hearing of it, and then seeming to take courage advanced a little way. But its resolution was short lived, and it soon halted. She laughed.

"Go, then!" she said. "Perhaps thou hast a family of small dependents awaiting thee."

As though obeying a longed-for command, the mouse turned and disappeared among the growing things inshore; and Lolli, tucking the flower into her hair, slipped back into the water.

There were trout in the river, slim, speckled drops of quicksilver; but they went not one whit the faster for her passing. When she reached her mossy landing place, she dressed leisurely, gazing down the awakening valley with eyes that seemed to see far beyond its mist hidden limits: those great golden-irised eyes of hers, wide and expressive like a leopard's or some other untamed creature's. Mysterious at all times, when she looked out from under half closed, heavily fringed lids they became dark, gleaming pools that

"When she reached her mossy landing place, she dressed leisurely"

none might fathom against her will; and as she now sat twisting her heavy hair into its accustomed plaits they were mystic with dreaming.

The spring of the year had got into her veins, and so she dwelt on sweet, half-formulated visions in which she and another personality met and were one. These confused periods of vague ecstasy were intermingled with reminiscences of the tall, young chair vendor; of the long, hot roads traversed in silent comradeship, of the scented twilights with him at her feet, listening while she sang, as on the previous night. A clear picture of some trivial incident would present itself to her mind, a swift vision, fleet in passing, but vivid, definite: say of the two standing beside some farmhouse door, or some such moment of the past day's trading. Then, without her will, it was obliterated, and she sank again into that sweet maze of her intangible adventures, that dear, languorous dream wherein she let herself be enfolded by the tender ego of that mysterious one with whom she dwelt there. His all-enveloping, elastic form closed about her, filling every pore with a longed-for rest. She drank in the love that emanated from him, as the breath of life. The free wind blew across her forehead, and it seemed

to her as the touch of his lips. The yearning which weighed upon her heart at all times — that which made her love the mother-mouse, the birds, the trees, and streams, all nature and all humanity so intensely — was for the moment soothed of its bitter sweet anguish and turned to a sort of contentment when his imaginary arms encircled her. Yet this Being who haunted her dreams, sleeping or waking, was very indefinitely sexed, and the emotion which called him into existence only partially recognized by the dreamer. Of late, however, it must be confessed that this dream companion had taken on one definite feature: his head was crowned by a mass of wavy, very dark red hair; a head which had grown familiar to common vision during the last few days.

Lolli's dreams were of realities, of beauty incarnate, rather than beauty abstracted. To her, spirit and body were so interwoven that the good of the one was the good of the other. Things that were a part of nature were a part of herself, and as such to be respected. That which was beautiful was good; that which was called evil, simply a sort of chaff of the soul: a waste matter that in the end would help to fertilize new beauty. What was tangible spoke so

plainly to her of the intangible, and what was mere suggestion whispered of something so vitally real that her heaven and earth were close at hand. To everything lovable she gave freely of herself, and her capacity for loving was very great. The creatures of the wood and field knew it, and perhaps it was this very magnetic essence of herself which gave her such a curious power over them. It was, when so exerted, a sort of reverse of the fascination of a snake.

Fully a half-hour passed in idleness before she arose to return to camp. When she did so at last her skirt caught upon a bramble by the roadside and in bending to free it she caught sight of something lying in the dust: only a green branch it was, but, seeing it, she stood fascinated and unable to turn away. A *patterin!* This was what she had been looking for these many and many days past! Vanished the mystic dream-man; vanished all thought of the red-headed vendor of chairs; all thought of those things which filled her usual day. Some voice in the green thing lying bruised in the dust seemed calling her, and in her heart awoke the cry, "I am coming." It was as though the sprig of spruce, newly broken, and to all but initiated eyes merely a mutilated thing thrown down

by some wanton hand, was a royal sceptre imperiously pointing the way along which she must travel whether she would or not; or, like a fairy wand, endowing a common highway with poignant possibilities. What had been a very sufficiently pleasant route for the day's journey became the Road of Promise. The green sprig was the message of gypsy blood to gypsy blood — an irresistible magnet the world over, whether it come from kinsman or stranger.

With a little cry she sprang up from her inspection of it and ran to the camp, her one and only thought being to start away to where the caravans were crawling over the hills. The idea obliterated every other; she had no thought of Cecil; no thought of food even; nothing but that she must go, and at once! Her preparations for doing so took little time. Some things which belonged to her fellow traveller she put to one side with a gesture of impatience, their significance, as indicating that she was not alone, not reaching her preoccupied brain. She simply did not take him into consideration at all, far less pause to leave a message for him. The call of her people was in her consciousness and she heard no other.

Her strong, supple fingers soon finished their tasks,

and rapidly harnessing the little pony she backed him into the road and springing into her seat set off at a smart pace.

The morning was now bright and clear with a promise of heat later on, and as she drove, Lolli kept a close outlook for further signs of the Romanies ahead. For several miles the sandy trail ran uninterruptedly, and so there was no token to be seen; but at the crossing of the two state roads she looked eagerly about, and there it lay, a tiny emblem pointing straight ahead. On she travelled through hamlet and village, here threading between a dozen or so houses about a general store, there passing a little community of buildings clustered under the wing of a barren, sweet-smelling creamery, built of new pine and standing bleak and guiltless of paint beside some old waterway. Then the country grew more lonely, and as the sun rose higher little puffs of white dust were flung in her face from the pony's hoofs. At every cross-road she found the *patterin*, and ever it pointed west over the lesser roads. For a while this puzzled her, for the country around was rough and deserted and there was little to attract people whose living depended, ostensibly at least, upon fortune-telling and the sale of

small wares. Then an explanation occurred to her: it must be a large encampment shifting quarters. That was it! For of course a goodly number of people with their heavy paraphernalia would choose a less frequented road, so as to travel more rapidly and less conspicuously.

A small white farmhouse stood at the crest of a long sandy hill up which the little pony was bravely plodding at mid-morning. The sun was glaring down in merciless power now, and the squat, uncompromising homestead, set there miles from any neighbour and undecorated by the proximity of a single tree, seemed like a monument to human stupidity and unfriendliness. The acreage around the place was rocky, and the soil outworn; only a few scrubby bushes grew about the dooryard, which a dozen chickens had scratched bare of everything else. There was an air of general thriftlessness and neglect about it that was almost too ugly to be pathetic. As Lolli came abreast of the house, the pony gaining the crest of the hill by a gallant pull, she saw an old woman who, late as the hour was, had just begun milking her cow, a sleek Jersey, apparently the only prosperous creature on the premises. The sight of the white

milk foaming into the pail reminded Lolli that she was hungry and thirsty, having eaten nothing since the evening before. So stopping the tired pony, who was glad enough of the rest, she leaned forward and gave the old woman greeting.

"Good morning, mother," she said. "Will you give me a sup of that good milk?"

The woman looked up at the sound of a human voice, an unfamiliar thing to her, poor, lonely soul! But when she saw the girl who had spoken, her expression changed from pleasure to extreme anger. Her old eyes blazed with wrath, and she stood most erect as she fairly screamed:

"Gypsy! You gypsy girl! Go along, git away from my house! Go, go!"

"But mother," pleaded Lolli, "I am very hungry, and it is far to the town."

"What's thet ter me!" shrieked the woman. "A good riddance, too, if a gypsy wuz ter starve! Don't *I* starve because of you, you thieves? Git along, be off!"

"But listen ——"

"Listen, indeed, ter a murderin' gypsy! I won't nuther! Oh, if Towser wuz only livin' I'd set him

on yer! So yer'd steal even my cow's milk, eh? Git out, yer thief!"

"I am no thief!" cried Lolli, holding out her hand with some coins in it. "See, I will pay you."

At sight of the money the woman appeared somewhat mollified, and in silence permitted the girl to descend and approach her. She even took up one of the pieces of silver and examined it.

"Well," she remarked, putting it back after satisfying herself as to its genuineness, "yer kin hev th' milk, though it's hard enough work fer me ter git it fer yer, Lord knows, with th' rumeticks in my fingers. An' there's a crust of pie in th' kitchen, too. But yer'll eat outside—I won't hev no gypsies in my house."

"Very well," said Lolli, "and I will milk the cow if you will let me, since it is so hard for you to do."

"No, no," said the woman hurriedly.

"But why not?" asked the girl.

"Yer might hurt her," said the woman acridly.

"Indeed I will not!" replied Lolli. "See, she stands quite still for me, and I know how very well."

She seated herself on the stool and soon finished milking, the cow standing placidly the while, and the

woman hovering about watching suspiciously, for gypsy practices with livestock are well known.

Before she touched the frugal meal that was set for her upon a long bench outside the kitchen door Lolli turned out the pony and searched her stores for such provender as she had left to supplement her own fare. Returning, she found the old woman seated on the door step.

"Do you live here all alone?" asked the girl as she ate.

"Whut's thet ter you?" asked the woman cautiously.

"It's not my affair, of course," she replied, "but you seem to have no one."

"I ain't got a soul," said the old woman quaveringly, "an' all because ev ——" here she checked herself, glancing furtively at Lolli.

"It must be terribly lonely for you," said the girl pityingly.

"Whut d' *you* keer?" demanded the woman.

Lolli shook her head slowly and swallowed a large bite of pie.

"How could I help caring?" she asked in her simple way.

The woman was surprised and taken somewhat

off her guard. Her frail, little, crooked body in its faded calico dress seemed to tremble like aspen as she said brokenly:

"An' you a gypsy!"

"Why do you hate the gypsies?" asked Lolli.

The woman's answer was as simple as the question.

"They took my son," she said.

"Oh, no!" cried Lolli, as though she had been struck. "They surely didn't steal your little boy?"

"No," said her hostess shortly; "he wuz sixteen; he went hisself."

"Oh!" Lolli breathed a sigh of relief. "But how can you blame the gypsies, then?"

The old woman's face grew dark with anger.

"They bewitched him inter goin'," she said.

"How dreadful!" exclaimed Lolli; "only I do not think they did anything but persuade him. How long ago was it?"

"Two years last month," replied the woman; "afore his father died."

"Perhaps he wanted to go," suggested Lolli.

His mother bridled.

"He wuz brought up Christian!" she exclaimed. "His pa wuz a deacon, an' we hed prairs night 'n'

mornin', an' noon-time, too. He warn't never allowed ter go out nights, ner 'sociate with no bad comp'ny, nor do nothin' 'cept fear God 'n' mind his parents an' git his chores done: No *in*-deed, he wa'n't brought up so's he'd been likely 'ter want any sich thing!"

"You were pretty strict with him," commented Lolli.

"It wuz his *pa's* way," said his mother with a little sigh. "Sometimes I kinder think it wuz mebbe a leetle bit lonesome fer 'im, spite o' the fanciful books he used ter read, an' that we hadn't oughter been quite so kerful."

The woman's face looked very small and old as she said it, and Lolli's heart was wrung with pity for the poor, bereft creature. Mentally, she bitterly censured the son who had deserted his mother thus; and when she arose to take her leave, she drew a generous handful of coins from the little leather bag she carried in lieu of a purse, and emptied them into the woman's lap.

"There!" she said, "take this and my thanks: perhaps both will help you a little. All Romany folks are not so wicked as you think, so do not be unfair to them, I beg of you. And perhaps your son

will return. He is very young and will soon wish to come back to you, I feel sure."

Her voice was very gentle with the soft, throaty notes in which she spoke to the woodland creatures. The old woman looked up at her, speechless, tears running down her deep-lined cheeks.

"Good-bye!" said Lolli cheerily. "It will all come out right; you see if it doesn't."

Once more the long white road: through all its infinite variety she rode, and let her fancy play with the possibilities which lay before her; peopling the woods on either hand with adventures of love and mystery, seeing the secrets of the streams, or listening to the symphony of the fields as she passed. And always at the cross-roads the sprig of spruce, a fragrant token, pointed the way. As the afternoon wore on she pressed forward more eagerly than ever, urging the little *grye* to do his best. Surely she must soon catch up with the Romanies! Gradually she became all attention, putting away dreams and fancies and peering anxiously ahead to catch the first glimpses of the caravans when they should appear.

At a little hamlet called Jordan a crowd of school children, white clad and festive, poured from a square

little house of learning where three roads met. They were noisy and excited, and by their dress and the presence of some score of mothers, it seemed that an entertainment had just been held. The children ran out into the road in groups just ahead of the pony, blocking Lolli's progress and quite heedless of their danger. She managed to pull up just in time to avoid doing any harm, and, at the cries of the frightened mothers, several of the youngsters looked up inquiringly.

"Oh, see!" called one little girl, "there is another gypsy!"

At this all of them looked round, and some of the more timid sought shelter behind their mothers' skirts. "A gypsy, another one!" they cried, and one little boy put out his tongue at her. The road was so crowded and trampled about that she could not see the *patterin* that would tell her which of the three roads to take. The words of the children gave her a clue, and leaning forward she asked:

"Which way did they go, the others?"

For a moment no one said anything. The awe natural to the occasion of being addressed unprofessionally by one of these strange, wandering folk

held them dumb. Then the boy who had made the face at her pointed to the west.

"They wint thet way," he said in an unnatural tone.

"Thank you!" said Lolli pleasantly. "Will you let me pass now, please?"

The crowd drew back and remained hushed until she had gone by, and then broke into a clamour of discussion.

For a half-hour longer she drove on and then, in a little dell near Jerico, she saw something glimmering white between the trees. Turning in toward it, she soon discovered it to be the canvas of a tent, and in another moment the newly made camp of the gypsies was spread before her gaze.

Everywhere was colour and confusion. Tents and covered wagons stood about in an irregular arrangement, not in avenues, but grouped on one side only of the path which their entrance into the shallow undergrowth had beaten down. Some horses stood patiently by while their owners hastily made the most necessary preparations for their own comfort. Two boys were going about collecting other horses from certain wagons and leading them to a clear pasture just beyond the wood. These were animals belonging to

older women whose *rommados* were absent, either in this world or the next. Far into the wood reached the jumble of tents, some of white, some of brown, some patched with dull reds or blues. Large and small wagons stood between, and near each arose a thin spiral of smoke from a new-lit fire. The grove was alive with movement and colour as its inhabitants moved rapidly about their business with shrill or musical cries, and now and then a burst of laughter. It was a very large tribe — or "family" as they call it — numbering some two hundred souls, and the dogs, of which there were a great many of every description, added their clamour to the general uproar. Most of the women wore the traditional gypsy dress, with their heads bound up in gay handkerchiefs, though here and there flashed a gaudy cotton kimono, or a modern, store-made dress. Most of the men wore overalls or nondescript, disjointed masculine apparel of a similar nature; but all wore small gold rings in their ears, and added some other slightly picturesque touch to their appearance. A very few had the beautiful sashes, or the velveteens with the precious gold or silver buttons, which are handed down from generation to generation.

A slim, brown-footed boy passed, running lightly between two bay horses which he led by the bridle on either hand. At sound of a command from an older man with a handkerchief tied about his head, the boy turned and gave a laughing assent. Two girls of sixteen or so were seated on an upturned box, intent upon the revelations of a pack of cards, their dark braids of hair sweeping over their shoulders. Near at hand a woman with a baby at her breast was crouching on the ground, leaning over occasionally to stir a fragrant mess that cooked in a copper kettle over a well-fed fire, while on her hearthstone, that narrow slab of slate or soapstone which once all gypsies carried about with them, but which has now almost became obsolete, thin cakes were browning. Close beside her two dogs were disputing the possession of some object with a half-naked child of three. Two boys, engaged in a scuffle further down the rough path, were separated by a tall, angular man who looked like a pirate: he took one in each hand by the scruff of their necks and knocked their heads together before he let them go; at which a group of people who stood by to watch laughed heartily. In front of a large caravan a woman who would have been very pretty

but for her enormous weight was cooking supper upon a modern oil stove. Behind her the interior of the wagon could be dimly seen, with its swinging lamp, three decks of sleeping bunks, and a string of brightly coloured baskets, her stock in trade, hanging across the ceiling. This was a regular *ker-vardo*, more resembling a prairie-wagon of the fifties than anything else, excepting that in this case the roofing was of boards, and four small, glazed windows, neatly curtained, adorned the sides, while a sturdy pair of folding steps, red painted, gave access to it at the rear. Many of the wagons were on this order or made in imitation of it — heavy vehicles with broad-rimmed wheels. Some had canvas covers stretched over rounded arbours of iron or wood, but most of the people had contented themselves with commoner conveyances, having only ordinary grocery wagons with the former owner's name obliterated, and a few arabesques in colours replacing it by way of decoration and, perhaps, disguise. They smacked suspiciously of booty, did these items of the caravansary.

In the shadow of one of them a youth was talking to a tall girl whose face shone as she looked up into his. They stood close together and spoke in whispers.

Lolli turned away her eyes. A fat man was boasting of his prowess to a group who laughed at what he said, while at a little distance from them a patriarchal looking old fellow was teaching a brown bear to dance, prancing solemnly before the creature, a carrot held high in his hand as a reward for progress; an absurd figure, but no one laughed at this: it was a serious business, teaching a bear. Not that the animal was cross or dangerous, but because bears brought in a lot of money, though not so much, of course, as horse trading. The old man's family stood watching with critical interest while the bear made ponderous efforts to emulate his master. An infant wailed from one of the tents, and the full-throated, tuneful voice of a young man floated up to the roseate skies as he tinkered at an old brass kettle and sang:

"Hokk tute mande
Mande pukkra Bebee
Ava, chi.' Ave, chi!
Mande shavva tutte—
Ava, chi!"

If to me you prove untrue,
I will tell your aunt;
Yes, my girl, yes, my girl.
Though I've been so fond of you,
Never think I shan't!
Yes, my girl!

At each "*Ava, chi!*" he brought his hammer down with a double tatoo that resounded above the prevailing din.

Over all glowed the pink light of the setting sun, accentuating every colour, silhouetting every dark object with unusual sharpness, illuminating the rugged, keen faces of the men, softening and lending them a sort of painted glory; tinting the faces of the women with a fleeting blush, which, though it should be gone on the morrow, would leave such as were lovely no less so for being brown. The stately elm trees that formed the background were black against the crimson western sky which now loomed as far away as though these people had not been travelling toward it since dawn. The charming light gave the scene something the effect of a stage picture, so vividly did it pick out the detail, so kindly did it beautify all that it touched, making even the sordid things picturesque.

Strange people these, mysterious and elusive; alike in all countries, among all races, speaking a language that is still practically the same wherever their kind is met with the wide world over; ever restless, a race wilfully apart, free and untamed as in

the long past age when they came out of Egypt; shy of the stranger, tender of their secrets as are the little denizens of the wood; ever wandering, ever travelling toward the setting sun. There seems something symbolic, something mystic, in this endless journey westward, this unwearying pilgrimage of theirs. Why do they travel so, as if to the world's edge? What do they seek there? Is it to catch the sun itself at last, when it is most golden? Perhaps, for they love gold. But whatever the reason, they will not tell it, possibly because it is an alchemist's secret; or else they hoard its meaning because it is one of the few things which still belong to them only.

Thieving, sharp-witted, dishonest in their relations with the *Gorgio* as they term any one not a gypsy, and whom they regard as their natural prey, they are yet honourable amongst themselves, having standards which one of their number violates at his peril. Their women are virtuous, and the men chivalrous, as a rule, and they are kind to animals with that truest kindness which is born of understanding. As regards loyalty to each other and to their tribe, they have few equals, and among them are still a few of the older order who have a fierce pride

of race, looking down upon all other peoples as slavish, and jealously resenting any intermarriage with them.

Their justice is swift and sure, and revenge for wrongs, especially if done to their women, inevitable as fate. In every phase their lives, as lived for and among themselves, are as different in atmosphere from that which they show to the *Gorgio* as were the sacred mysteries of old from the great public rites. They live in a world of thought, manners, and customs incredibly different from ours, and when an occasional alien is taken in amongst them he effects far less change upon them than they do upon him, for as a rule he becomes to all intents and purposes one of them, and is well content to be, finding that they offer sufficient singularity of purpose and ancient beliefs to furnish the necessary rock-bottom of existence, and a sort of ordained and decreed license, such as is very agreeable. The Egyptians, or Romans (whichever you will, for they call themselves both indiscriminately), have absolute liberty, for they are bound together only by family or voluntary ties, and can leave the company at will: but this they seldom do, for to be an outcast from the tribe is the worst of punishments.

Much of this Lolli felt intuitively as she looked about

her, observing but unobserved as yet. Her cart was too similar in character to the majority of those in the encampment to attract special attention; she appeared to be simply a belated member of it returning for the night. Then all at once the woman with the baby looked up and saw her as she drove in slowly. Their recognition was mutual, for they had met in a farmer's dooryard some days ago. The woman stood erect and called the attention of those nearest her to the intruder.

"Look!" she cried scornfully; "here comes the *pauno-mui*, the girl who likes best to be with Gentiles—the one I's told about!"

And in another instant Lolli was surrounded by a noisy, curious throng.

IX

INTRODUCES SOME RAGGED ROYALTY

SHE must be taken to the *sher-engro*," said one of the women in the group; "she don't belong to the tribe, *parla*."

"Pretty fool, the king's away," replied a lad. "He is gone on a matter of horses."

The crowd laughed at this, and another boy cried out: "Who has seen the thousand-dollar gelding that was lost in Lenox?" at which the laughter increased. Evidently the quest on which the caravansary's governor, or king as they called him, had gone, was one which would scarcely bear examination.

"Shall we's let the pale one stay with us till he returns?" asked the first speaker, eying Lolli curiously.

The questioning cry was taken up, and for a moment Lolli stood abashed and frightened, her slender hands stretched out before her as if to ward off the violence of their harsh voices. Then into the midst of this

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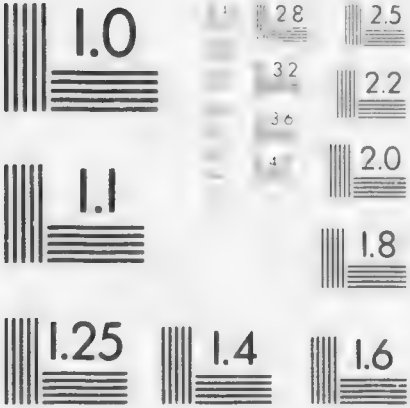

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hostile throng came a figure, both brilliant and grotesque, at whose appearance a semi-quiet fell upon the people, as they stood aside to let it pass.

It was a young man, not twenty years of age; thin and very tall, with the loose-jointed figure and gait of the typical hobble-de-hoy of comic-paper tradition. His lean face bore the stamp of the Yankee to an unmistakable degree, and his gray eyes beamed with surprising mildness in contrast to their overhanging brows. His cheek-bones were high, his chin was narrow, and the wide mouth had full, sensual lips. A bright bandanna handkerchief was tied about his head and knotted in the nape of his neck, and on top of it he wore a broad-brimmed hat adorned by a bunch of cock's feathers. Large gold hoops dangled from his ears, and the rest of his dress was no less piratical and improbable. Over a shirt of immaculate whiteness was a jacket of crimson cloth, elaborately embroidered with many-coloured worsteds and threads of gold. The buttons were five-dollar gold pieces, and his Roman sash bulged dangerously in spots, as though weapons were concealed in it. Across his breast hung a dozen or more medals manufactured from tin or brass, with cheap enamel blazonings. They seemed

to be advertisements, or to have come from all sorts of prize packages, and on one of them was the picture of a hotel with the motto, "souvenir of New Orleans," below it. His khaki trousers were embroidered down the sides in the same sort of worsteds which trimmed his coat, and the lower part of his legs were thrust into a pair of high boots with white tops, such as grooms wear. In his hand he carried a whip with three thongs and a heavy silver handle. The expression and bearing of this extraordinary person was one of pleased self-importance; he was like a child parading with a wooden sword. Pride in his outrageous costume emanated from every pore. He was evidently immoderately pleased with it, and had expended much careful thought upon it. There was nothing so subtle as to be called "histrionic" about his pose; it expressed the frank, unrestrained delight of a barbarian or a child. He was all dressed up and he knew it, and didn't "care a cuss" how it affected others, so be it that he himself was satisfied, while the laughing, ingenuous expression on his face was the rankest contradiction of his garments' ferocity of effect.

"Whut's all this?" he demanded, stalking up to

Lolli, and looking her over with frank curiosity, which swiftly changed to admiration. "Strange woman, eh? Wall, seein' as how Bally ain't here, guess I might's well ax her a few questions myself, so long as I'm his dep'ty, so ter speak."

A murmur of approval ran around the crowd which was now six or seven deep, and a voice said: "Ask so that we may know if she's true Romany." A dark-browed girl nodded fiercely, and they all stared at Lolli unwinkingly, like so many watchful animals. The hobble-de-hoy squared his shoulders and took a step or two forward, giving a pull and pat to his girdle as he did so, for all the world like a self-conscious girl at a party. Then he cleared his throat and addressed the newcomer.

"Whut's yer name?" he demanded in a "give up your sword" sort of tone.

"It is on my cart, as you can see," replied Lolli bravely —"Lolli Plashta."

At this reply there was an instant of dead silence, followed by a titter which rippled over the crowd and burst into a shout of laughter.

"But thet's not a name," said the New Englander sternly; "don't yer give us no sass, now!"

"It *is* my name," she insisted quietly.

The laughter came again, broken by cries of "Red cloak! See the girl who calls herself a red cloak!" and, "a fine name that," and so on.

"Now-look-a-here," said her interlocutor, cocking his head to one side like a playful pirate, "thet ain't no name, *Red Cloak*, yer know; but ef yer choose ter use it, why I guess mebbe yer got a good reason. Whut was yer took up fer last?"

"I don't understand," she replied, puzzled.

The crowd tittered again, but the brilliantly clad one silenced them imperiously.

"Sure yer don't understand?" said he with a friendly wink. "Yer never *wuz* in jail, I suppose?"

"Certainly not!" she cried indignantly. "So that is what you meant! I call myself so because I wish to, not because I have done anything wrong."

She was so dignified in her defiance that the hostile attitude of the crowd began to change perceptibly. They liked that sort of fire.

"Wall, be yer Romany?" asked the spokesman. Then swiftly: "*Coin se deya, coin se dado?*"

"I do not wish to tell," she flashed.

"*Pukker mande drey romanes!*" he demanded.

She looked at him in dismay.

"I don't understand," she faltered.

"Don't yer?" he jeered. "How'd yer come ter know 'Red Cloak' and 'pa' an' 'ma' ef yer don't understand, tell me?"

"I have never lived with gypsies," she said slowly, and with a regretful note in her voice, "and so there is much that I do not know about them and their tongue. But some things I seem to remember as if from a dream, and these I say, or understand, I scarce know why. None the less, the road has called and called to me; I have looked long for the Roman sign, and when at dawn I saw it upon the road it seemed like a brother's hand beckoning, and so I came."

Her low voice could be clearly heard in the intense silence which followed her first words, and as she finished, a tall slip of a girl with limpid brown eyes, came to her side and slipped a brown hand into hers.

"It was even so that he came," said this latest arrival, nodding toward the gorgeous hobble-de-hoy; "he is my *rommado*, and I should have waited long to wed had he not come, called by the road."

There was a murmur of assent and many heads nodded sagely, while the youthful and wondrously

clad husband patted his costume complacently and strutted about, happy in the intensified glare of public scrutiny. The woman with the baby at her breast made a cabalistic sign in the air with her free hand.

"The *mi-dibble* calls all of the Balormengri together," she said solemnly and turned away, the people standing by respectfully, for she was believed to be a *chohawni*, or witch, and as such was listened to with honour. The cross-examination ceased as if by magic and the people began to disperse. Supper was waiting, and, after all, nothing more exciting had occurred than the acquirement of a new member, one to be regarded with suspicion for a probative period – interesting to be sure, but in spite of this, certainly second in importance at the moment to the cravings of the inner man. The *roma* of the Yankee boy had not let go of Lolli's hand. She now turned to the latter and asked her to bring the little cart over near theirs.

"Adolphus is the wisest of the Balormengri," she said proudly; "he is even able to read and write, and so we have our *ker-vardo* beside the king, whom he helps in lots of ways. We will take you for our sister."

Lolli thanked her, and together the three set off down the row of tents and wagons, walking abreast and leading the little pony. It was quite a distance, into the very heart of the camp, but although they passed many people who had not seen the disturbance caused by her début, no one paid her the slightest heed, the company in which she appeared seeming to guarantee her position. They stopped at last beside a large *ker-vardo* wi h a wooden roof and a body that was gay with painted flowers and strange misshapen birds of brilliant plumage. It was scrupulously clean, in marked contrast to most of those about it, especially its nearest neighbour, a dingy tent.

"This here wagon is ourn," announced the Man of Wisdom. "Yer might ez well draw up alongside, scein' the' missus hes took sich a fancy to yer."

To this pressing invitation Lolli acceded, and with the assistance of her new friend, who could not do enough for her, she was soon comfortably settled. The latter was a handsome girl, typically gypsy, and wearing very fine clothes of the true Roman design, from her silk-wound head and her gold hoop earrings to her morocco shoes. Her features were aquiline

and her skin dark but clear; her figure, slender without being thin, was graceful as a panther's, and her large brown eyes were full of a tender wistfulness. Taken all in all, she was quite lovely, and much gentler than is the wont of her kind. She attached herself to Lolli like an affectionate puppy, and talked to her most vivaciously, while the beautiful stranger prepared the evening meal. It was evident that she was greatly attracted by Lolli, and meant to cement their friendship before a rival claimant appeared.

"Is not our wagon beautiful?" she demanded. "It is the handsomest of the double ones. Many large families in the tribe hasn't got such a big wagon, and none has one so splendid. Adolphus made all those lovely bright things on it hisself. We have no trade — all the others makes baskets or tinkers or some such things, and lots of the women tramp about all day telling fortunes, while their men lies lazily about. But I — I don't even has to *dukker* unless I wishes!"

"It's a wonderful wagon," said Lolli admiringly, "and so large! Your *rommado* must be very rich!"

"Yes," said the other, "it *is* a big wagon, and oh, so empty, with no trade and only two people. But

wait until November; then there will be three!" she laughed roguishly and clapped her hands in delight.

"Why, you are only a baby yourself!" cried Lolli, laughing back at her.

"I am *so* much!" she replied holding up her hand and unclosing it three times.

"How very old!" said Lolli. "Fifteen! And how old is your *rommado?*"

"I don't know," replied the girl, tired of the subject. "My name is Miriam — Adolphus's Miriam; and, yes, he is very rich, for he reads for the king and helps him with his knowledge. Therefore we don't has to work."

"And where is the wagon of the *sher-engro?*"

"Oh, he don't have a wagon," explained Miriam condescendingly, "The king always rides a fine horse; he has lots of them. And when he is in the camp he sleeps in that tent beside our wagon."

"But his wife and family?" objected Lolli.

"He has none," said Miriam succinctly.

"And where does he eat?" asked the practical Lolli, getting out her large blue teacup.

Miriam fairly shook with pride, and the string of little gold coins across her forehead tinkled as she replied:

"*I* cooks for him!"

On the following morning Lolli went off upon her business, as did most of the other inhabitants of the camp, and after a very successful day of sales in the immediate neighbourhood returned to the grove and the smoking campfires at sunset. She was tired and happy, with the peace which follows directly upon the attainment of an object striven for, and which is so sweet until the inevitable reaction sets in! There was dancing among the Romanies that night. Worn out with the long day's effort she did not join them, but went early to sleep after a simple but delicious meal which she shared with Adolphus and Miriam. Little thought of Cecil came to her except in her dreams, which she forgot upon awakening, when life in her new surroundings absorbed her attention wholly.

Before the sun had turned the pastel of the dawn into the glowing, painted day the Balormengri were astir. Across the camp two cocks greeted the first gray streaks upon the sky; and then, with a sudden clamour which aroused her into full consciousness, their cry was answered from a coop beneath her friends' *ker-vardo*, where, as she afterward learned, a noted feathered warrior was kept for uses anything

but domestic. As though in response to a signal, the camp began its straggling toilet. A few men slouched past to the river, pail or dipper dangling from a lazy hand. A woman darted from a nearby tent and seized upon an escaping child whom she proceeded to thrust into its single garment without which it had elected to walk abroad with absolute unconcern. The *chies* appeared at their accustomed tasks with a unity and suddenness almost magical, a brief toilet appearing to suffice them; for, like the ladies of Japan, the gypsy women seldom disturb their compact head dresses. Fires were kindled upon cold hearths, and the incense of their warming arose fleecily, wafting a fragrance of burning green down the valley. Then, all at once, like the rising of a curtain upon a singing chorus, the day and its people were in full swing, and within the hour each had settled to his task, in the camp or off upon the highway. The next day was a repetition of the first except that at night she acceded to Miriam's request that she remain beside the latter's fire after supper, in order that they, together with the hobble-de-hoy private secretary, might have some talk.

The full moon was riding across the cloud-streaked sky, casting a weird light over the placid landscape,

and here and there throughout the encampment glowed the remains of a fire. Over at the edge of the wood a group of young people were singing and dancing, and where the adjacent brook ran clear in the moonlight over its rocky bed a tinker's forge sparkled at his rapid little hammer taps. All in the immediate vicinity of the *sher-engo's* tent was very quiet, and many of the older people were sleeping or away on some mysterious nocturnal affair: all save an ancient crone who, with bent head and claw-like hands, spread and respread a pack of greasy cards before her in the borrowed light of the bonfire. With intense earnestness she told them, muttering to herself the while and struggling to win the answer to some puzzle of fate which would not reveal itself. Miriam stretched out a slender hand and touched her husband's gorgeous coat sleeve, which glimmered fantastically in the dancing light.

"Has he not a splendid coat?" she asked of Lolli. "Our forefathers always had coats like these, but very few has them now-a-days. The women thinks it's silly to make them, and they doesn't do it. But I made all this wrought work with my own hand. I likes it."

"So do I, very much," said Lolli; "it is ever so much nicer than the common clothes most of the men wear, especially the overalls. I don't like them at all; they don't look like gypsies in them."

"I wouldn't wear no *overalls*," Adolphus broke in. "I had enough o' them back on the farm!"

"Were you once a farmer?" asked Lolli. "Of course I knew you were not born a gypsy, but Adolphus is not a New England name."

He gave her a sidelong glance before replying, and then said slowly:

"Wall, yer see thet ain't really my regular name — I kinder made it up, same's yourn — see?"

She nodded comprehendingly.

"T'aint thet I wuz ashamed o' my own," he added quickly; "no by heck! not a mite! My right name is Hosea Fear-God Smith, but while thet sounds purty good fer farmin', 't ain't got th' right sound fer a gypsy king's furst *lieu*-tenant; so I had ter think up somethin' more likely."

"How did you come to join the gypsies?" asked Lolli.

The lad straightened up from his lounging position with a sudden fierceness, and struck himself vehemently upon the breast.

"How did I come ter?" he cried. "Look-er-here, look at these clothes, look at thet wife o' mine, look at this here handsome wagon, look at these here trees over our heads — see all of it, th' campfires, th' singin' crowd, thet ole witch woman over yonder with th' kerds even — the *idea* of it all! Think of th' chances we're takin' every day, of whut we see, of how we travel, an' how we live, an' then you ax me thet again! Here I be 'sociatin' with kings, with er princess fer my lady wife, an' lots ter eat an' nothin' ter do. There I wuz, back on th' farm, with nothin' but work an' pray, pray an' work, an' both es ugly es hell! Why, no one ever sed anythin' 'cept ter speak about th' chores or hell'n damnation. There wuz never no comp'ny. Every night, go ter bed at dark ter save candles; every morning, up at daylight. No let-up 'cept church three times of a Sunday, an' thet ain't enough for a young feller ter live by! Jumpin' Jupiter, so help *meri Dibble*! Th' way th' old folks acts is enough ter drive a saint away, much more a good, lively boy!"

"Yes," said Lolli; "I think I understand. Tell me some more."

"Wall, one day this here caravansary made a one-

night camp down th' road from our house a spell, an' es I wuz a-hoein' th' far patch o' potaters, there wa'n't no one ter see me when I dropped th' ole hoe an' kited down there ter take a look around. Gosh! but what I seen made me open my eyes! Every one so keerless an' cheerful-like. Some wuz a-dancin' an' some wuz a-workin', but jest ez eff they liked ter, 'cos no one wuz after 'em all th' time ter see they got it done. I'd never seen th' like afore. Wall, after a spell, I got a-talkin' 'ter some of th' boys an' when I heered th' way they got on without workin' hardly none, you kin bet I begun takin' notice. After walkin' round some, I seen Miriam here. Say, she looked at me just too cute fer anything outen them big brown eyes o' her'n, an' by 'n' by, I sidles up an' says somethin' perlite like, 'Leave us hev a dance,' 'er somethin' o' thet sort; an' she says, 'Not on yer tintype; yer don't belong ter my family."

"I did not!" exclaimed Miriam laughing. "I says that you were a *Gorgio*, and not of the tribe, and so I's could not dance with you, for the hairy old aunt would not allow it."

"Mebbe thet *is* it, more exactly," said Hosea Fear-God Smith, "but th' meanin' is th' same, anyways.

Wall, thet made me hot fer I wuz determined not ter let her think she wuz no better'n me, but I didn't know exactly whut ter do, so off I walks, es she wouldn't look at me no ways."

"Then after another spell I got talkin' ter a big feller who scared me a powerful lot. It was old Bally hisself, though I didn't know it at th' time, and th' skeer I hed already would a' been 'bout doubled if I'd a-known he was th' king. But skeer or no skeer, I put on a bold front an' he took a fancy ter me. 'Why don't yer come along of us?' he says in his big voice, but reel friendly. 'Wall,' sez I, 'I ain't willin' ter come on no *mean* offer. If yer hev got somethin' reel tony, I might consider it,' sez I, 'fer I aint goin' in fer anythin' less' — and I throws back my coat kinder keerless, so's he could see these medals, which wuz pinned on my shirt. 'What did yer git them fer?' he axed me, his eyes a-shinin' at th' sight er them. 'Sir!' sez I, 'a real hero don't ever talk about such things; it don't become his modesty,' I sez. 'You talk real learned,' sez Bally, 'kin yer read?' 'Sure I kin,' sez I, 'any kind er print er writin.' He seemed kinder thinkin' fer a moment an' then he sez, 'You come along of me an' do my readin', which I

can't, never havin' been learned, an' I'll treat yer good.' Wall, I went, an' here I be! Thet's two year ago now, an' I bet yer I'm ez good er gypsy es any o' 'em. I kin speak their lingo, an' I'm one o' th' biggest bugs in this crowd: not ter mention havin' caught Miriam here, after a long an' arjous struggle!"

"I must say, I do not blame you for running away," said Lolli. "Still, there were your own people to consider. How about the folks back home? How do they manage without you? Have you any brothers?"

"Naw! I hed two, but they died years before I wuz borned," he replied looking straight at her, his large, undeveloped face clouding with a sudden thought. "D'yer think th' old folks misses me? I ain't often thought er thet, but I hev sometimes. D'yer think they does?"

The notion seemed to trouble him greatly; and Lolli felt as one feels at interrupting the imaginary splendour of a child's game with the information that it is injuring something.

"Hosea Fear-God Smith," she began slowly, "did your parents live over toward Sodom?"

"How did yer know?" he asked. "They do: in a leetle white house ——"

"At the top of the long, sandy hill," she finished for him.

"Yer know 'em!" he burst out after a moment's stupefaction. "Hev yer seen 'em recent?"

"I saw your mother two days ago."

"An' pop?" There was an eagerness in his voice of which he was quite unconscious, and which went a long way toward proving that he was not without a natural affection for his parents.

"I am sorry to be the bearer of bad news," said Lolli softly, her golden eyes full of pity; "but your father died almost two years ago."

There was a moment's silence.

"Poor, old pop," said the boy huskily. There was a long pause. Then: "Is ma well? Did she speak o' me?"

"She spoke of nothing else!" said Lolli cheerfully; "but she is all alone there, and far from well. I think you ought to ride over there and see her."

"I will!" he cried, throwing his preposterous hat into the air and catching it again in the intensity of his relief at the prospect of an action which would

ease his newly and uncomfortably awakened conscience, "I'll go ter-morrow; I'll take Miriam; thet'll cheer th' ole lady up a heap!" "

Lolli recalled the elder Mrs. Smith's greeting of herself.

"I would not take Miriam the first time," she cautioned; "your mother doesn't like gypsies, and might be unkind to her."

But Miriam had no intention of going.

"I's will not go in friendliness to the house of a *Gorgio*!" she cried, "No, not even to the house of thy mother, O beloved! I's a true Egyptian and a Balormengro! I's will not do so, lest I be tricked into remaining."

"Never worry 'bout *stayin'* on th' farm," he reassured her. "I wouldn't never do thet again myself. But wait here, ef yer like, an' I'll get mother ter join th' tribe, instead."

With which sanguine and optimistic remark, he arose to say good night.

Lolli lay wide awake for a long time upon her pallet-bed within the little covered cart, and thought over the hobble-de-hoy's story and her own part of providence in it. But she was so unaccustomed to

sleeping under the canvas hood that presently the lack of air began to stifle her, and rising, she opened one of the flaps, and pinning it back to let in the breeze, pulled her mattress to the opening and lay so that she could look out into the night. The camp was dreaming in the white moonlight, and everything was hushed with that pregnant silence which belongs to living things asleep. From the most distant tent by the brook arose the thin wail of an infant, feebly piercing the stillness. It must be Fennella, the little basket maker's child, which had been born that day, mused Lolli; and she smiled as she thought of the young woman's happiness and of the joyously expectant Miriam. . . . Suddenly, the whiteness of the night was blotted out, and with a chill of terror she beheld, within a few inches of her own, the face of the man from whom Cecil had rescued her.

X

REFERS TO THE COUNTERPLOT

LATE on the morning following the Chichesters' nocturnal episode, which had so distressed the banker and left him in such a dilemma in regard to his wife's behaviour, Lady Hylliary was driving eastward from Broadway through a street in the Thirties. She had just come from a most successful suffrage meeting in one of the theatres of that district, at which she had been chief speaker. Her thin face still glowed with the memory of her welcome, and of her subsequent triumphs in the cross fire of questions from the audience. Those doubters who were unfortunate enough to make unintelligent queries or querulous anti-franchise statements had met with scant mercy at her hands; while those with stronger arguments found her more than a match for their best endeavours. It had all gone most satisfactorily, and she was disposed to beam upon the

world at large, even though the cab in which she rode was somewhat ancient and jounced her about most abominably, besides skidding upon the wet asphalt, for it was pouring rain.

In this pleasant mood she peered from the window, looking at the streets as she passed with interest and curiosity. The city had altered marvellously since her girlhood days, when she had last lived there, and what was not new and confusing was old with the charm of familiar things in disguise. Houses that had witnessed the festivities of her youth were sordid lodgings or draggled tenements with wretched shops beneath. Where once the comfortable but ugly residence of some wealthy family had stood, a theatre with a mock-Greek portico had sprung up in marble splendour, while on either hand stood dirty, nameless houses with closed shutters like weary, dissipated eyes in sleep. How it had changed, all this neighbourhood! There stood the very house where she had made her first bow to society. A second-hand clothes dealer had it now, and a modern show-window on the ground floor displayed a fluffy mass of somewhat dubious finery. . . . The street swarmed with humanity. . . . How things glittered in the wet! . . .

How nice these people were! Yes, all of them, just because they were alive and human. . . . Even the ragged urchins there, who, with a generous impulse, were sharing a pair of roller skates and shrieking their enjoyment loud enough to be heard even above the roar of the traffic; even the pasty and suspicious-looking fat woman who came out of a stage entrance, a wardrobe mistress probably, hard faced, but of an age to which no human being lives without having done some good. Even the corrupt-looking officer of the law who lounged against the entrance to a gaudy saloon; or the poor, lost soul who hurried along in the shadow of the houses, frightened at finding herself abroad in the wholesome light of day. . . . Yes, she liked them all!

Whenever Lady Hylliary felt elated she condoned humanity; whenever dejected, she laughed at it.

They had almost reached Sixth Avenue. How well she remembered when that elevated road was built, though she would never have said so aloud: but remember it she did! How angry the Prendergasts, whose house was rendered uninhabitable by the new structure, had been when it was erected. Was not this the very street that their house had stood on?

She leaned forward to look. Yes, there it was, she would be at it directly: but how dreadfully it was altered! A shop with grated windows had been installed, and a side entrance with a vestibule door marked "private entrance" had been built out in the cross street. Then, as she looked, a well-known figure came out of this door, and, opening an umbrella, started uptown on foot.

At first she could scarcely believe her eyes, and, startled, she looked again. No! she had made no mistake! An instant's thought decided her course of action, and restraining the impulse to stop the cab she waited until they had crossed Sixth Avenue, and then putting her head out of the window to the immediate ruin of a French hat, she gave the driver an order.

"I'm to foller that young woman? Yes, ma'am!" he replied with interest, turning his vehicle uptown.

At Forty-second Street the cross-town traffic held them up for what seemed an unconscionable length of time, and Lady Hylliary frowned with impatience. Would they never get by? "Plague take the traffic," she grumbled; "we've lost touch with her. I'm certain it was she, though. I must drive on and let Jack know."

A neighbouring clock loomed above the carriages ahead. "After twelve o'clock! Too late now in any case to reach her luncheon engagement, unless she turned about and started at once. But this she did not do, and soon the policeman's whistle released them and she told the driver to continue up the avenue to the Chichesters' house.

When Lang opened in answer to her impatient ring she immediately asked:

"Is Mrs. Chichester in?"

"No, my lady," he replied; "but the master, he's in the library."

"All right. I'll go there. Please telephone at once to the Hotel Marie Antoinette that I shall be unable to lunch with the Daughters of Liberty, but that I shall try to get there in time to deliver my speech."

Then she swept down the hall to the library and entered without knocking.

John Chichester was in the act of writing a letter, but arose hastily upon seeing her.

"Is it of Barbara?" he cried at sight of her agitated face.

"No," she replied, shutting the door behind her.

"But it's something serious. I have just seen Adele come out of a pawnbroker's office on Sixth Avenue. Although it was raining she was on foot, as if she had wanted to keep her visit there a secret.

"A pawnshop!" he exclaimed. "Are you sure it was she?"

Lady Hylliary made a gesture of impatience.

"Certainly," she asserted. "Do you suppose I should have come here to tell you if there were any doubts about the facts?"

"No no, of course not!" he replied. "But how strange! Has she returned yet?"

"No, Lang says not," she answered. "What are you going to do?"

"Ask her why she went there," he said simply; "her answer may clear up many things."

"Hum!" said his sister-in-law, "so I suppose. But for Heaven's sake, my dear boy, be careful how you do it! Pardon my mentioning it, but you see how your somewhat irascible temper has affected your daughter's behaviour!"

He flushed up angrily, but held his tongue. Chichester had had more than one encounter with Janet and had invariably been worsted, his armour of dig-

nified self-consequence being but poor defence against her wit. So instead of replying as he would have liked to, he asked with some assumption of mildness:

"Since you have so poor an opinion of my powers as a diplomat, perhaps you, in your superior capacity, will suggest a better way of approaching her than mine?"

"If you will answer me a few questions, perhaps I can," she replied, not in the least abashed.

He lifted his eyebrows.

"You may ask if you wish," said he, "and if I reply at all it shall be absolutely truthfully. But if I see fit, I shall not answer. One can never tell what you will ask next, you know."

"Very well. Are you niggardly about the amount of money you give her?"

"That depends upon your estimate of generosity," he said grimly, "She has an allowance of five thousand dollars a year, and unlimited credit, which means, of course, that I foot most of the bills."

"That's very little ready money for a woman in her position," said her suffragette ladyship.

"Adele is absolutely without a notion as to its value," he asserted; "besides, as I say, she has a great

many bills; practically all of her expenditure is charged to my account."

"I see," said Janet; "credit at several shops and modistes' establishments where she has to get her things whether she wants to or not."

"Nonsense! She has everything she desires," he retorted, somewhat nettled. "I tell you Adele has no head for figures, and for that reason I keep her allowance small. But she is at perfect liberty to buy what she pleases, both she and Barbara."

His voice rather failed as he spoke his daughter's name, and Lady Hylliary replied hastily to cover his emotion.

"Has she any property of her own?"

"Nothing which she could liquidate without my knowledge," he replied. "This house stands in her name, as do the Lenox and East Hampton places."

"That gives her the right to vote on three school boards!" exclaimed Janet, her mind for the moment sidetracked by this inadvertent touch upon the border of her life interest. "Does she do it?"

"Of course not!" he frowned. "I would not have her mix herself up in any such matter even if she

wished to, which she is far from doing. But are we not straying from the subject?"

"True. So it is evident that Adele could not immediately raise very much money, if she suddenly needed to?"

"I did not say that," he said; "she has only to apply to me for any sum within reason."

"Then the obvious conclusion is that she needs money for some purpose which she wishes to keep from your knowledge."

"Yes, evidently," he answered dryly. "Have you any idea of what the reason may be?"

"None whatever."

"Any suggestions to offer?"

She shook her head.

"It's a mystery to me," she declared, "and I only suggest that you do it mildly. Begin by simply asking her where she has been."

He smiled as at an amusing recollection, but one with bitterness in it, too.

"I might try that first," he said.

Just then some one was heard to come in at the front door and go upstairs. Chichester opened the door a trifle and listened.

"It is she," he said briefly.

"May I come? she asked, following him into the hall. He nodded, and together they went up the wide staircase.

Mrs. Chichester was taking off her hat when they came in. A look of annoyance which she was not quick nor clever enough to conceal crossed her face before she thought to control it. Evidently she had expected to see neither her husband nor her sister

"Why, where did you drop from?" she asked playfully. "I thought you were lunching out, Jack? And Janet! Is it possible that you have a disengaged meal hour?"

"Half-hour only," said Lady Hylliary. "How wet you are. Go and change at once."

"Yes, you look uncomfortable," added her husband. "Where have you been to get drenched in that fashion?"

"I have been around at Elsie Hammond's playing bridge all morning," she answered carelessly. "It was only two blocks away, and so I did not trouble to send for the motor. I believe I will change my things, though, if you will amuse yourselves for a moment or two."

"Janet thought she saw you down town this morning," said Chichester. His wife looked at him calmly. "It was down on Sixth Avenue, didn't you say?" turning to Lady Hylliary for corroboration.

"Yes, it was," the latter assented. "What on earth were you doing there in this weather, and on foot at that?"

The question came unexpectedly, but Adele did not flinch.

"You were mistaken," she said, raising her eyebrows at her sister in surprise. "I went only to the Hammonds. I have not been down town, and am not quite mad enough to go on foot even in the finest weather. And now I'll go and change; would you mind ringing for the maid? And will you call up Elsie and say that if they find a small, gold-mesh bag it is mine? The 'phone is right there beside you on the desk."

She went into the bedroom, leaving the door ajar. Lady Hylliary and Chichester exchanged glances, and the latter went to the telephone. He obtained the desired number, and presently was speaking to Mrs. Hammond. Janet listened intently.

" . . . Yes, this is Jack Chichester, Elsie. Did Adele leave her little gold bag at your house?

. . . Oh, you found it and wondered to whom it belonged . . . Thanks awfully. . . . No, I beg you will not trouble to, I will send Lang around for it this afternoon. . . . Thanks, I will with pleasure, very soon, Good-bye!"

He hung up the receiver, and turned to Janet with an inquiring look. Her eyes had not lost their gleam of suspicion, although she now wore a somewhat puzzled expression as well.

"It's all right, Adele," he called to his wife. "She found it after you had left."

Then he turned to Lady Hylliary with an expression which plainly showed a malicious satisfaction in having proved her mistaken for once at least; while she, angry and ashamed, began to wonder how she could have made such an idiotic mistake.

There was certainly more than a resemblance between the woman whom she had seen coming out of the pawnbroker's shop and her sister. Why, their very clothes were alike! How was it possible that she could be so completely wrong? Adele *must* be lying! And there stood Jack looking at her like a Presbyterian minister at a temperance meeting, just as if he had not been ready enough to suspect his

wife of some mischief not ten minutes since. What self-satisfied hypocrites men were. Evidently he had concluded that she *had* made a mistake regarding the woman she had seen — and perhaps she had. The little scene just enacted was so plausible, so natural, that she began to believe that she might possibly have been doing Adele an injustice. Still, whatever John Chichester might choose to think, she, Janet, could not succeed in entirely extinguishing the suspicions which smouldered in her brain, half formed as these suspicions were, and vague as she was as to their exact character. She was, in fact, firmly convinced that there was a mystery here somewhere. However, an outward sign of repentance and conversion was now in order, unless there was to be a row between her and her brother-in-law; and she prepared to keep her dignity by apologizing immediately, of her own accord. Suddenly he took his eyes from hers and spoke.

"Shall we go down to luncheon?" he said lightly. "She will be along directly, I expect."

"Very well," she assented. "But, Jack," she added as soon as they were alone in the hall, "I just want to say how ashamed and sorry —— "

"You need not," he said briskly, "you may spare yourself the pains. We have let our imaginations run away with us."

As they descended to the dining room, Chichester's step was lighter and his bearing gayer than it had been for weeks. In this instance, at any rate, his wife was vindicated, and as the present matter was so easily cleared up, might not her account of how she had spent the previous evening be as true as that of this morning's occupation? Only once did a doubt shadow his mind, and that was the recollection of the perfume worn by the woman in the park. But there was a possible explanation even for that. Might not some woman be impersonating his wife for a reason still unguessed? Her maid, perhaps; or could it be — Barbara?

XI

SUGGESTS A NEW PROFESSION FOR THE ENGLISH NOBILITY

TO RETURN to the doings of our belted earl. For a man who was usually rather reticent, Chamboyne had a remarkably large vocabulary which he seldom put to use save when under severe stress. Included in this choice collection of words were many which could not have been found in any dictionary, but which, none the less, were fraught with meaning. The best of these were brought into play during the first few moments that he stood in the brilliant sunlight regarding the empty camp on the morning of Lolli's unheralded desertion of him. To his credit be it said that most, if not all, the uncomplimentary remarks were directed at himself.

Having satisfied himself that she really had gone, and was not playing him a trick, he announced himself in turn to be several varieties of a certain long-

eared species, an unmentionable kind of idiot, and an accursed sentimentalist and dream chaser. And the responsibility for his having become all these things he put upon Lolli. What else, though, ought he to have expected from a roving gypsy girl, a common little peddler? But she *wasn't* a common little peddler — yes she was, confound her; no, of course she was not, for she was supremely an Individual, no matter what her class. Then why in thunder (and several other things) had she gone sneaking off like this without even the decency of a good-bye? This noble lord of poverty-stricken acres was as angry with his nymph as he was in love with her — which is saying a good deal!

Not that he analyzed it thus himself; to his own thinking, he was merely angry — he had been made a fool of — taken up and played with only to be thrown down at will by this golden-eyed girl, as though he were a toy of which she had tired.

Cecil considered this matter a little while and came slowly to a realization of how highly he had been valuing himself. Then he looked earnestly at the trunk of the oak tree under which he stood, and told it that he was a cad.

The conclusion was more readily reached than it would have been a month earlier, for the past few days had been wonderfully educational to him. But Lolli did not know what had been going on in his mind and therefore his caddishness did not excuse *her* in the least. Suddenly he grew very angry again and smote the unresponsive oak with a nice, smooth stone. This exhibition of violence soothed him somewhat, inasmuch as he hit the exact knot-hole for which he aimed, and he then turned to the making of a rather unsatisfactory breakfast of overdone bacon and underdone coffee, which he contrived to concoct for himself out of the stores remaining in his wagon.

As he ate disconsolately, he pondered upon his next move. The towering mass of his wagon with its brilliant load of sticky new chairs caught his eye, and with a large slice of bread in one hand, and a cup suspended half-way to his mouth in the other, he paused to revile his incubus.

"Just look at the damned thing," he remarked in an ominously mild tone; "what am I going to do with it? Obviously I cannot drive it up to Prescott's door; he'd fall on my neck, thinking I'd turned Socialist — I should never be able to explain it away.

I can't leave it here — that would be too wasteful, with so many chairless people in the world. And then there are the horses."

Here he absently bit at the cup, swore, bit at the bread, and resumed his soliloquy.

"I might give it away! Say I met a tramp I might tell him to come here and get the thing, that he could have it with my blessing. But would he take it? No. I suppose not. In all probability he would conclude that I had stolen it and go for the police; or perhaps merely run for his life under the impression that I was mad."

Then a slow process of reasoning took possession of him. What was it that De Vaux had done with his racing stud when he wanted to get rid of it? By Jove, yes! That was it! De Vaux *sold* it, every horse! The thing to do was to sell the outfit. But how? He was familiar, to a moderate extent, with the process of buying, but how did one go about the other end of such transactions?

"Bosh!" he finally exclaimed aloud. "Of course I can sell the whole shebang. I'll let it go cheap, say five pounds, or so. They are nice chairs, and fairly decent horses. Surely some one will buy them."

With this optimistic resolve, he arose, and, hastily gathering up the dishes, piled them into the tool box and set about harnessing the horses. This he accomplished with ease, having become an expert under Lolli's critical eye. Then, climbing into his lofty seat, he drove off in the general direction of Barrington, the nearest large town, which he had expected to pass through, en route, with Lolli, and had given as a possible address in his letter to Lady Hylliary. There he would drive his bargain and get his mail: thus he tried to cheer himself.

The horses were fresh from their long rest, and drew the big load briskly. With hard driving he hoped to reach Barrington that night.

As he sped along, the beauty of the day entered his spirit, and despite himself, his wrath against his late companion began to cool, and a sort of self-pity and feeling of being unjustly abused came upon him. He loved her; she was the only woman in the world for him. Why had she treated him thus? But then, of course, she could not very well know of this love of his, since he had not only refrained from informing her of it, but had done everything in his power to conceal it from her! And now he was glad he had

done so — at least so he told himself — for he evidently meant nothing to her; certainly nothing more, at any rate, than a fellow traveller who had been of assistance to her, and whom she had amply repaid by her company for a little way. It was only too true that he had no real claim upon her, he thought bitterly, and of a surety he would pursue her no farther. She had made it plain, by her action, that she did not wish him about any longer. Had he found the least indication of her having left him against her will, of having been carried off by some gypsy enemy, or anything of that sort, he would have followed her to the ends of the earth, and left no place unsearched until he found her. But her voluntary desertion had wounded his pride. There was but one thing to do, put the whole ridiculous episode behind him and live out his life as best he could, apart from all womankind.

He had just reached this melancholy conclusion when a shrill feminine voice broke in upon his reflections with the cry:

"Hey, there, young feller!" repeated several times with ear-splitting insistence.

So surprised was he at this unexpected hail that

he involuntarily drew rein, and before he could collect his wits, a large, elderly woman with a heaving, calico-covered bosom of ample proportions had waddled breathlessly down the path from a trim farmhouse, and was discussing the merits and demerits of one of the red rocking chairs with a tall, slouching fellow in overalls, evidently her son.

"I am in a hurry, madame," began Cecil in a dignified tone. "I'm afraid I cannot wait ——"

"That's all right, sonny," said the woman cheerfully. "Me an' Hiram won't take up a speck o' time. When I make a trade I don't go foolin' away time as if I didn't know what I wanted! Now Hi," she went on, turning to the youth; "there ain't no use in your a-pullin' sech a long face; you know perfeckly well the summer boarders won't stand for them rickerty old cheers on the porch another season. So cheer up! Which'll we take, red or green?"

"Which is cheapest?" queried her son, in a sepulchral voice.

"They are both the same price," replied Cecil, at a loss what to say.

"Then I reckon we'll take red," said the boy, "eh, ma?"

"How much is them rockers?" asked the woman.

Cecil's brain reeled. How much would such things be worth? Not a great deal surely, for they were only made of common wood with wicker seats. He made a wild guess.

"They are four shill — that is, a dollar," he said faintly.

"A dollar!" screamed the woman. "I ain't talkin' about them kitchen cheers, I mean th' *rockers* — th' big ones."

Evidently he had made a mistake. The woman was looking at him as if she thought him crazy.

"Oh, *those?*" he replied with assumed carelessness. "*They* are *two* dollars."

There was a hasty whispered consultation between mother and son, during which he caught something about "them red ones is worth all of five," and then the woman remarked briskly:

"I'll give yer five dollars an' two dozen eggs for three."

"Done!" cried Cecil, who was anxious to escape. "But, really, you know, what shall I do with the eggs? Do keep the eggs!"

The woman looked surprised.

"I don't take favours from nobody," she said, stiffly. "You'll take th' hull business, please!"

He was mute at this, and Hiram went into the house for the money and the eggs, while Cecil unloaded the three big rocking chairs and set them upon the grass. He found them surprisingly heavy; perhaps they were worth more than two dollars apiece. His customer evidently thought so, for she beamed upon them with huge satisfaction. Also she evidently felt it incumbent upon her to say something pleasant, having made such an eminently satisfactory deal.

"My! it's lucky you happened along ter-day," she remarked. "I'm expectin' th' boarders ter-morrer. City folks, they be. Mr. Simmins, up Lenox way, he sends 'em every year — pays fer th' sick young one himself, an' he ain't rich at that. He's th' salt o' th' earth, if he *has* got some queer notions," she declared. "Don't know what I'd 'a done withouten him after my husband died. If ever you git inter trouble, you go straight to Sam Simmins. Well, here's yer money an' here's yer eggs," she added in a different tone, as Hiram reappeared.

Cecil leaned from his perch to receive his payment, and setting the box of fragile treasures beside him,

he tucked the money under it and drove off amid a volley of "good-byes," and admonitions to "call ag'in nex' year."

A mile beyond the house he halted in a lonely, secluded spot, and throwing the reins around the whip, took the box of eggs in his hands and lifted the cover a crack. He looked at the contents in perplexity.

"Oh, *dear* me!" he remarked, all stronger language seemingly pitifully inadequate to the demands of the situation.

Then he made a cautious descent, placing the box securely on the chair below him and then climbing down to it. After repeating this operation several successive times, he reached the ground in safety, and carried his burden to the roadside, where he deposited it carefully upon the grass. He hesitated for a moment, and then stooping, he removed the box cover.

"Perhaps some hen will find them and sit upon them," he murmured hopefully, and clambering back to his seat, drove on.

He had not gone far when a slim young housewife accosted him and insisted upon buying a clothes rack — "one of the folding kind, for fresh-ironed clothes."

Cecil had not known that he possessed such articles, and indignantly denied having any until she pointed them out, strapped underneath the wagon. A great many little children hung about, clinging to her skirts, while he got the clothes rack out for her, and he refused to accept but a few cents in payment. She must have begun her struggle with life very early, he thought, looking at her faded prettiness and the squalor of her surroundings.

At the farmer's where he stopped to ask for a meal at twelve o'clock, he being very hungry by that time, he was met by a hearty welcome, rather to his surprise, for the place showed signs of considerable activity, and he feared his appearance would be considered a bother.

"Waal, guess we'll hev a spell o' rain now," said his host as he ushered Cecil to a place at the long, crowded table. At the words, those already seated — farm hands, they were, great strapping fellows — together with the farmer's wife and daughter, broke into a gale of laughter.

"Cheer peddler, eh?" remarked the man, who sat at Chamboyne's right.

"Yes, how did you know?" he responded in surprise.

There was a renewal of the laughter.

"By what he said," replied the man, jerking his knute in the direction of the host, "'bout th' rain, o' course!"

But Cecil, being unaware of the New England tradition that a chair peddler is a sign of rain, did not rise with the smart retort which they expected to their chaff; and so he was put down in their estimation as a "good-natered sort of a cuss," and received by them as such.

After dinner he was delayed for almost an hour by the farmer, who wanted to trade with him; and in common decency he was obliged to assent. It ended by the old gentleman's taking a folding bench with green legs, for a dollar and the dinner.

As he drove out of the yard, Cecil looked at his watch. It was past two o'clock and the town of Barrington, according to the farmer, was still twenty miles away. It would be practically impossible to reach there before night with his heavy wagon and cumbersome load. He might as well proceed at his leisure and find lodging by the way, going on to his destination in the morning.

The experiences of the forenoon had not altogether

driven the delinquent Lolli from his mind, and at each recurring thought of her his heart leaped painfully, like a new wound upon which hands are laid; and, as he drove on, the longing for her became so intense that he felt he must distract his thought from her or else go mad. A picture of her, with wide golden eyes and sweet grave lips, hung tantalizingly before his vision, and against all pride, all reason, he felt that he must have her — he must! But visions and dreams, with the sweet desires they brought, were not to remain long undisturbed.

Some enterprising New Englander had built tiny bungalows all over the property which had once been his father's farm, and a dozen, at least, of innocent city families had been beguiled into renting them for the summer. The property edged a small, mosquito-ridden lake upon which floated two precarious looking rowboats, moored to a decrepit pier. The houses, if such they could properly be called, were new, evidently of that spring's growth, and though inhabited, were not completely furnished. So as he unexpectedly rode into the chair-barren community his appearance was heralded with joyous acclaim, and the city people, already bored with having nothing upon which to

spend their money, rushed out in such force to purchase that he was obliged to dismount and display his wares.

To avenge himself for this enforced sale, he grimly determined that they should pay highly for every thing they purchased, and so, in response to each inquiry, he named a price which even he knew to be outrageous. But still they bought. A thin-nosed lady from Brooklyn was most persistent, though a capable looking Boston matron came close second. The former took occasion, as she paid him for a lounging chair, to inform him *sotto voce* that she was a poetess. Just what bearing this had upon the purchase Cecil failed to see, but he murmured, "not really!" most politely, at which she looked offended, and turning away, talked loudly about "common people's lack of appreciation of the arts" to a helpless little man in a hot, black broadcloth suit.

Annoyed at first, and very unwilling to be forced into the post of salesman, the novelty of making money — actually earning it — began to appeal to him tremenduously as he stood there among the chattering crowd and reaped a rich harvest. After all, he was a Scotchman, and the race is noted for its shrewdness and love of barter. Not without result

had he been bred of such stock, and of a surety, the blood of Earl Angus, staunch partner of the merchant prince, ran in his veins.

It was so ridiculously easy to make money! Why had he never thought of it before? It occurred to him, as he made change for the stern matron, that earning money was far easier after all than marrying it! One could stop trading and rest at any time, whereas being married — why one had to be *married* all the time, you know! Of course work was easier. Work! Why this wasn't work. He had merely lounged along a pleasant road all day, and people had stopped him and forced money upon him. No one could call *that* disagreeable; for if he had really wanted to, he could have driven right by without stopping — say, if the people looked sufficiently uninteresting, for instance. Provided they did not oblige him to carry eggs about, it was quite delightful. So far he had made not the slightest effort to dispose of his wares, and during the period of travelling with Lolli he had not given the matter a thought. Yet now, despite his lack of endeavour, he had made a remarkable number of sales, or so it appeared to him. What would happen if he were to exert himself? He deter-

mined that the remainder of the drive to Barrington should witness the execution of the experiment. Why did people look down on trade, he began to wonder? Surely it was a far more decent occupation than lounging about a beastly club all day, drinking rotten whiskeys and sodas! Wasn't Prescott always ragging about something of the sort? By Jingo! There was something in it, after all! He began to wish that he had paid more attention to those lengthy discourses of his friend, and resolved to make up for his abstraction at some future time. Prescott might possibly be right.

Truly Cecil Henry Fitz-Williams was learning much!

Oh, the magic of personality! What miracles it wrought for him during the remainder of that momentous trip! With his handsome face and bouyant youth and his muscular slenderness, he needed little else to commend him to the casual acquaintance; but when he aroused himself to the exertion of his wholesome charm he seemed a very god to the simple folk with whom he met. He had no notion of the extent to which he impressed them, or that old Mrs. Kesiah Brown, matron of the Poor Farm where he spent the

night, bought four quite superfluous benches from him because of the courteous tone in his voice; or that the frail little school teacher to whom he sold six wooden camp chairs for the "assembly room" bought them out of her own slender purse for the privilege of talking with him; or that she stood long at the vestibule door and gazed wistfully after him with her weak blue eyes behind their thick glasses, thinking in her heart that he was of a surety a visitor from that Olympus which she described to the inattentive ears of her charges. The building at the door of which she stood was that little schoolhouse on the triangular bit of turf where three roads met; but the turning which Cecil chose was not that which Lolli had taken when she followed the alluring twig of fir. Up, up, rose the heavy cart on the steep side road to Barrington. When at last it rounded the hilltop and disappeared from view, the little teacher still stood staring as though she could see it, the wind whipping her lank hair about her face in straight wisps, and whirling the dust in little eddies upon the unkept path at her feet.

But there were many who bought because of their practical needs, and when at last, at the end of the day, he drove into the illuminated high street of his

destination, his wagon was almost empty and his heart, save for the haunting thought of Lolli, as light as the remainder of his merchandise. One might almost say that the Earl of Chamboyne had found his vocation!

XII

SPREADS AN INVISIBLE NET

ALL the underlying mystery and hidden evil of the gypsy nature seemed concentrated in the face which bent over Lolli as she lay paralyzed with fear, but it had vanished before she could utter the scream upon her lips. With a tremendous effort of will she controlled the sound, and, after a moment of breathless silence, nerved herself to peer out into the night. All was quiet. Where had the man gone? How had he managed to melt away? Where could he be? She had not long to wait before discovering. There was a low chuckle of satisfaction which came from the shadow of her neighbour's wagon, and presently she was able to distinguish the figures of two men who stood within its blackness. They were speaking in whispers, and using the Roman language. With acuteness born of her alarm she managed to strain

her hearing sufficiently to listen to what they said, although most of their talk was unintelligible to her. What little she understood, however, seemed to refer to herself.

"It is she," said one, and the other voice when it answered, was familiar.

"Sure it is!" It was the nasal drawl of the New Englander, who replied in English. "The resemblance 'twixt th' picture is perfeck. No one could mistake it."

"She woke when I looked upon her," said the other voice, which Lolli now placed as that of her assailant. "I think she is affrighted. Let her be watched closely, and see that no harm comes to her."

The Yankee spoke again, saying something which she could not understand. So she was safe for the moment? From what? Poor comfort that! Was the evil-looking man her friend, rather than her enemy? And why? It was puzzling and very terrifying. Then again came a sentence of which she was unable to get the context. The gypsy was speaking.

"Come into my tent and read me the words beneath the picture once more," he said.

The two men moved away softly and entered the small tent of the *sher-engro*, where a lantern was

burning dimly. As they passed in she caught a clear glimpse of them. Yes, one was Adolphus; the other man wore a hat which partially concealed his face, but she had no difficulty in recognizing him as the man who had gazed down upon her a few moments before. And they were entering the king's tent! *Could he be* ——? Then she remembered many things rapidly. What had the man called out to Cecil as he rode off on his handsome horse? "You have not yet settled with Lasho Balormengro." That was it — Balormengro, "the hairy one," as the name means in Romany. Had not Miriam spoken the name as her own? And was not the girl called a princess? Yes, yes! And she had spoken, too, of the "hairy old auntie." Fool, fool! Not to have remembered sooner! Oh, how could she ever have forgotten that name of ill omen? She should have fled before he returned.

And so this man was the king, the vaunted *sherengro* of whom Hosea had bragged. Would the Yankee lad stand by her and help her if need be? or would he range himself on the side of his master and carry out any orders which the latter might lay upon him? The man Lasho would not be likely to spare her, after the rough usage he had received on her

account. Yet he was giving the word for her protection! But despite the assurance she had overheard concerning her present safety, she did not close her eyes again that night.

That she must escape quickly was obvious; but how? The simplest manner appeared to be to ride away as she had come. Accordingly, when the first gray streaks of light showed above the blackness of the tree tops she arose, and, hastily adjusting her dress, set about harnessing the pony, which fortunately was picketed near by, owing to her late return on the previous evening. She was very quiet in her operations, the pony's footfalls as she led him to the shafts being the only sound in all the camp, which still lay deep in slumber. With whispered words of coaxing she backed him into place, and then reached beneath the cart to the hooks upon which she kept the harness. It was gone!

At first she believed that she must be mistaken, and, getting down upon her hands and knees, searched anxiously beneath her domicile, but it was not there. The interior of the cart was next examined, every crack and cranny of that little place being peered into thoroughly. Lolli wished to be very sure she

had not mislaid it, before coming to the conclusion that it had been stolen. She looked in the most unlikely places which could not by any possibility have held its bulk, and under objects which could not have so much as concealed the collar, her alarm increasing at each failure to bring her property to light. At last she was forced to realize that, although she had not slept, the harness had been stolen, literally from under her nose; and so, vexed and thoroughly disquieted, she had perforce to take the pony back to his pasture. As she led him away her mood was not lightened by hearing a smothered laugh from one of the shadows near her. She instantly turned her head toward the sound, but could see nothing. The dawn was not yet in full swing, and the shadows were still treacherous.

Then she returned to her cart and sat down to think matters over. That she must defer her departure until she could either enforce the return of the harness or secure new was all too plain. But what had been the intent which prompted the theft? She knew well enough that the gypsy folk are not over-scrupulous about acquiring other people's property; and her harness had been a handsome one, red bound and

silver-fitted. Still, they were not given to stealing among their own people, and in the two days she had spent with them she had attained to a certain degree of their friendship. Besides, her cart contained many things of more or less value, and these remained untouched. Surely a common thief would have taken some of them. Yes, it appeared almost certain that there had been an ulterior motive in the robbery. But the camp must contain many more harnesses, and she still had a little sum of money. The idea cheered her a little. And this much of her programme being arranged for, she realized that she was faint with hunger, and set about preparing her breakfast. While she was engaged in this operation Miriam appeared between the curtains at the door of her gaudy, four-wheeled house, and gave Lolli a smiling "Good morning."

"My harness has been stolen during the night," began Lolli, who was not given to preambles. "Is your *rommado* awake yet so that I may ask his help in finding it?"

"Why, little sister!" exclaimed Miriam. "How sad to lose the pretty trappings! But alas! my Adolphus has ridden out with the king. They has gone

to the railroad house, to the travelling way of the *Gorgios*."

"Then I will ask you, princess, to see that no harm comes to my other things while I go in search of new harness," replied Lolli, smiling despite her annoyance, so winsome was the dark little Egyptian. "For I, too, have business with the *Gorgios* and must be off as early as possible."

Miriam watched her with anxious eyes for a few moments and then said with assumed carelessness:

"I would not leave the camp to-day."

"Why not?" demanded Lolli, looking up.

"I — well, I think it's going to rain," said Miriam ingenuously.

"Is that all!" exclaimed Lolli scornfully; "you surely do not think that the rain would keep me here?"

How much did Miriam know, she wondered. Was there a deeper meaning behind her words than was apparent? She repeated her request that the princess would watch her things for a while.

"Sure I will," was the response this time, the idiom having been acquired from Hosea's vocabulary.

"Thank you," said Lolli; and having finished her morning meal she put the cart in readiness for instant

departure, and set out through the camp upon her quest.

The day was sullen and overcast with no promise of either rain or sunshine: a doubting day of the sort which completely upsets the plans of those who live out of doors, more especially those of the women who walk from farm to farm, *dukkering*. As a consequence of this weather there was less activity among the campers than usual at this hour, and they hung about and stared at her or gave her greeting as she passed their frail quarters.

She came first to old Sacki, the bridle maker, and found him in conversation with a handsome youth who was called Delengro — which signifies a kicking horse — which name was given to him on account of his wonderful ability to stick to the saddle. This young man had looked upon Lolli with favourable eyes from the first, and had spoken to her several times, always with frank admiration. Now, at sight of her, he sprang up and stood with flashing teeth and smiling eyes, bowing her a greeting, which she acknowledged absently. The old man put down the bridle he was at work upon — a gorgeous, embossed thing with fringes — and asked her business.

"A harness for my pony, brother," she replied.

"A harness — complete?" asked he.

"Yes," she made answer. "Have you one I could take at once? Mine has disappeared, and my business will suffer if I do not work to-day; even an ill-fitting one would do to make shift with."

The old man pursed his lips and shook his tangled mat of gray hair solemnly.

"Nay, Red Cloak, I has none," he declared. "Besides this bridle in my hand I has only raw hides."

"Then sell me the bridle," said she, knowing that she could ride the pony away if need be.

"Not so fast!" he exclaimed. "This is for the *sher-engro*, and I can't sell what is his!"

Lolli turned away, much disappointed. But there was another harness maker, she recalled, and she determined to try him before becoming discouraged. So, setting off in the direction in which she remembered to have seen his tent, she wended her way among the half-naked little children, the dogs, and the lounging women. Delengro seemed to be going in her direction, for once or twice she caught sight of him among the motley crowd, speaking here to some fellow horse-trainer, there stopping to tease a frowsy girl, laughing

the while; and so it was no very great surprise to her to find him before her when she reached her destination. The man whom she was seeking seemed better furnished with completed material than Sacki had been, for several new harnesses hung on pegs inside his cart. Delengro, who stood fingering the buckles, smiled at her pleasantly, as though he had been expecting her, but Lolli paid him little heed and made her request to the proprietor, a sullen-faced man of the pure Romany type. In reply to her question he looked up moodily from the collar on which he was at work, suspending his labour, and after a short stare, resumed it with the remark:

"I does not sell to pale faces."

And although she knew this to be a falsehood, she pleaded with him for fully ten minutes, offering to pay whatever he asked, but she elicited no other answer. Disconsolate then, she wandered about the camp for half an hour longer, asking every one who would listen whether they would sell what she desired. But a sudden dearth of harnesses seemed to have come upon the camp; no one was willing to sell at any price. Why did she want one? Where was her own? And when she explained her loss,

they would scowl darkly at her in instant resentment, as though she had accused them of having stolen it. At last she gave up in despair, and, quite tired out, she sat down to reason matters out. Miriam, she felt sure, would not dare to be of assistance, even if she wished to. Where could she turn? What could she do? She felt as though an invisible net were being drawn gradually about her, and every step found her only the more completely entangled in its meshes. Why should this man, Lasho Balormengro, persecute her thus? Surely her repulsion of him could not sufficiently account for it! And it was momentarily becoming more certain that he, for some reason, took a very decided interest in her movements. Who else but the king could restrain the gypsies' cupidity to the extent of preventing the sale of their wares for good gold? Undoubtedly he must have given the order by which she was so persistently refused on all sides. . . . It now began to dawn upon her that it was her person, not her property, that he wished to detain, else she would have been robbed completely during the night. This thought, which now came clearly for the first time, sent a sickening wave of panic across her heart. Then she endeavoured to

dismiss the notion as an impossibility, but her original adventure with the man had unconsciously undermined her fearlessness and confidence in her ability to take care of herself, and the matter could not be put aside so easily. Following instantly upon her realization of her perilous position came the thought of Cecil. Why had she left him without a word or sign — this tried friend of hers? Oh, she was an ungrateful, silly child! He had warned her repeatedly, and she would not listen, and now ——! At that moment no appearance in the world would have been more welcome than a sight of his strong profile and dark red hair: but wishing was idle. It was imperative that she get away at once, and, as compared with the dangerous possibilities which the camp held the loss of her pony and cart was nothing, she determined to walk immediately to some farmhouse where she could find shelter, and then, if circumstances favoured it, find a means of sending for her belongings.

Fired to new energy by this determination, she arose, her heart beating a little faster than usual, and, passing through the fringes of the camp, stepped out into the open road, where she was accosted by Delengro, who overtook her before she had gone ten paces.

"Hold hard, Red Cloak!" he exclaimed, laughingly; "I's a messenger to you. Miriam, whom you knows is *shuvval*, has a great distress — a pain, and telled me to bring you to her."

Lolli, who had paused at sound of his voice, stood irresolute before replying. Miriam had seemed well enough an hour ago, and of all prospects a return to the camp was the least pleasing. Still, Lolli had grown fond of the child wife, and it was hard to refuse her. In her condition, Miriam might very easily have been suddenly taken ill. But how, if such was really the fact, did Delengro know of it when he had followed Lolli about all morning? She remembered then that she had lost sight of him just before sitting down to rest. Yes, he was probably telling the truth. Besides, what object could he have in lying?

"Will you not come? She suffers greatly," he repeated more seriously.

"Yes, I will," she assented reluctantly; "but why did she not ask for one of the older women?"

He shrugged his shoulders.

"She asked for you," he said.

When they reached the vicinity of the *sher-engro's* tent there was Miriam engaged in burnishing an al-

ready brilliant saucepan of pink copper, singing gayly the while. To all appearances she was in the best of health and spirits.

"Then you are well?" cried Lolli, running to her.

Miriam looked up in astonishment, as well she might.

"Sure I am!" she said, showing her white teeth; "who told you different?"

Lolli explained, while Delengro stood by, grinning mischievously.

"Where were you when he told you this?" asked Miriam, considering.

"I had just started to walk toward the town ——" began Lolli.

Miriam jumped to her feet and took the other girl by the arm.

"Come with me, foolish little sister!" she cried. "Of course he stopped you, and brought you back! It was a lovely trick."

She laughed merrily, and Delengro's mirth, which was at the danger point, exploded, and to celebrate his own extreme acuteness and cleverness he turned several handsprings.

"I's 'll take care of her," said the princess to him.

"Stop your antics and be off." Then she dragged Lolli with her into the gaudy wagon, and forced her to a seat.

"What does this mean?" demanded the latter with as much dignity as her breathlessness would permit. "Is there a plot against me? And are you in it, too?"

"Listen to me, little flower," said Miriam, placing a conciliatory hand upon the girl's knee. "I's your friend, believe me. Therefore, I's going to tell you the truth at once: You must not go on these walks of yours; it is not permitted."

"But what do you mean?" cried Lolli again, with a renewal of that sickening, panicky feeling.

"The woods is full of traps, and the fields has nets in them," replied Miriam, quoting an ancient Romany proverb. "You cannot get away, my little birdling. It is the word of the *sher-engro* which holds you here. Easier far for the hare, the *hoktamengro*, to escape the snare, or the bird to eat inside the net and fly away again at will, than for one for whom the king has built a cage to escape. Don't tries, oh, golden-eyed one, for it is useless — *mande's pukkered!*"

She nodded her head gravely, as one who states an irrefutable fact.

"But he cannot keep me here against my will!" cried Lolli, half rising in alarm. "What does he want with me? I must go at once!"

Miriam cocked her head to one side like a knowing bird.

"You are very lovely," said she, smilingly. "Perhaps the *sher-engro's* heart has been touched at last. It's not within my memory that he's had a *romi*."

Wild with fright, Lolli rose to her feet, with difficulty keeping herself from crying aloud! It was terrible, impossible! Yet after all was it not what she had suspected from the first? And even her friend, the gentle-eyed little creature sitting there opposite, thought nothing of helping to deliver her into the clutches of that evil man. Lolli glared down upon the girl with all the fierceness of her infinite scorn.

"Do not look so harshly at Miriam, who loves thee!" exclaimed the princess, lapsing into Romany. "'Tis not my fault that thou art held! Indeed, I do not fully know what the king intendeth to do with thee: but I will be thy friend in anything I can, save only thou must not ask me to help thee to escape. That I dare not do, even if I would."

Lolli did not reply, but stood tense and rigid, her wide, golden eyes gazing over the tree tops toward the free world beyond. Cecil was there somewhere. Oh, if she could but send him word, how gallantly he would come to her rescue! In the intensity of her fear it seemed as if he must hear the mute cry which she sent him over the blue distances! Then, with a sinking heart, but keeping a calm face, she turned and asked an abrupt question.

"When will the *sher-engro* return?"

"I do not know," replied Miriam, still in Romany; "sometimes he is away for many days; sometimes for hours only. Where he has gone, and for how long, I canno' tell. But in the meanwhile thou can'st feel both safe and happy, if thou'rt sensible and cease from troubling."

Then, as a faint shade of hope stole across the other's face, she added carelessly:

"Delengro hath been set to watch thee. So help me *duvel!* Thou can'st not get away by any means; do not try it, my sister, lest thou be hurt, for that would grieve me much."

Suddenly Lolli's taut nerves relaxed automatically, and she sank back upon the seat from which she had

sprung. Her lithe figure wilted and drooped in a pathetic manner.

"A prisoner!" she said incredulously, then several times in monotonous repetition, "A prisoner ——"

"Aye, call it what you like," said Miriam sulkily, speaking in English; "but you'd feel less sorrowful if you ate something. Here is some fine hot balo," she added comfortingly, as she prepared her own meal.

But Lolli did not hear, for on the floor in front of her fascinated eyes lay a newspaper — undoubtedly the one which the two men had been reading and discussing he night before — and staring up at the printed page was a portrait of herself — yes, surely, her very self — and beneath it were the words:

MISS BARBARA CHICHESTER
The Popular Débutante

XIII

IS VERY MELODRAMATIC

LASHO BALORMENGRO and Mrs. John Colton Chichester were talking together in the over-elaborate little bonbon box which the latter called her sitting room. The shadows of the early summer evening were fast thickening, and during a tense pause in the talk the soft "cloup-cloup" of a solitary passing hansom cab could be heard through the open window. In the close, scented room the atmosphere seemed charged with electricity. The gypsy stood expectantly, an evil smile on his handsome face, his pagan bearing ill concealed by the commonplace clothes he wore. His easy attitude and the confident, half-contemptuous look on his face made it plain that he had no doubts as to the outcome of the interview. But Adele was far from being at ease. The little lace handkerchief in her hands was twisted to tatters, and as she faced her

visitor every line in her rigidly corseted figure betokened the nervous strain she was under. When at last she spoke it was in a choked, unnatural voice, and with her eyes fixed upon the door beyond him as if in momentary fear that some one would enter unannounced.

"It is of no use, Lasho," she said at last; "I have no more money."

He smiled pleasantly.

"But how absurd, my girl!" said he. "Come now, it's no use singing that old song. Nearly every time I has honoured you with my august presence during the past twenty odd years you has said the same thing; but the money has always been found in the end. And I am being so moderate — only a thousand dollars!"

"It's of no use!" she said desperately. "I have not had half that amount in cash at any one time for years! Why do you come so soon again? Only a fortnight ago you had the price of my last jewels!"

"Ah! But that was a fortnight ago!" he replied. "I has an especial need of money just now. I may have to travel far at any moment, and I must have the necessary cash on hand."

"But what shall I do?" she cried. "I have nothing left — nothing!"

"Go to your husband, my dear," said Lasho blandly; "he will surely give you anything you ask."

"You know that is a worthless suggestion," she replied bitterly. "I have already had to ask him for money this week, and if I were to demand a sum of that size he would naturally be suspicious. You know how little he gives me!"

Lasho yawned, as though the subject bored him. Evidently it was merely the repetition of a too familiar scene. Then he shook his shaggy head and laughed a little.

"I simply has to have the money, my dear," he said. "Ask him for it, there's a good girl."

A sudden flash of defiance shook her at his insolent tone, and with momentary courage she faced him squarely.

"I will not!" she flashed angrily.

"Then I will," he replied quietly.

The effect of his words was magical. Adele became pale with terror. For a moment she was unable to speak, and her face worked pitifully, the powder cracking at the corners of her eyes and mouth. He

watched her amusedly, making a litle sound in his throat that was like the purring of a great cat.

"You know it would be foolish to let that happen after all these years," he continued in his rich voice. "Think of all the money you have paid out to keep me and him apart! Great pity to waste it!" He shook his head and purred again.

Then she tried to frighten him.

"What have you done," she demanded, "that you may have to hide at any moment? What wicked thing have you done? I'll not pay another cent, I'll not be robbed any longer. I'll hand you over to the police! What new crime have you committed now?"

Her anger surprised but did not otherwise disturb him. She had always been timid and easily handled before. What had come over the woman — was she really at the end of her resources? He took a swift glance about the luxuriously furnished room. Hardly! Why the clock on the mantel shelf was alone worth the sum he demanded!

"Never you mind what I've done," he retorted softly, narrowing his eyes into ugly slits. "Just you hand over! *I* ain't living a lie, and imposing on a decent man!"

The shot went home, and for a moment she was her old cowering self. Then the fire rose again, and she quivered with resentment, anger, and excitement as she turned.

"I'll take my chance about John," she said; "but I'm going to hand you over to justice! I've stood this long enough. For years my life has been a *hell*, yes, *hell!* Never, day or night, have I felt safe — never have I known what it was to go about peacefully and in safety from your persecution. I have paid and paid. And it hasn't been in money alone! It's been in blood — heart's blood — it's been in tears, and sleepless nights, in fear haunted days; the dread of seeing your face peering at me around a gilded corner when we were having a gay party in some Paris restaurant; the fear of meeting you when we walked through some old garden in Italy or in Roumania; everywhere, at any time, you might appear — and you did! And even here in America you show your evil face. And always money, money, more money. You have robbed me of almost every hour of happiness I might have had with *him!* I cannot endure it any longer: you and your accursed people are everywhere; it is too much, too much! I

will never pay again. If you attempt to see my husband I will have you arrested. Oh, there are plenty of charges against you! And who, then, will believe your word against that of Mrs. John Colton Chichester?"

"Her husband may," he replied grimly, "and she'll never chance *that!*"

"Wait and you will see!" she cried shrilly, and running to the telephone she picked up the receiver.

With the agility of a cat he sprang after her, knocking the instrument from her hand, and, pinning both her wrists together with his great thumb and forefinger, he led her forcibly to a little, gilded sofa and made her sit down upon it. Her breath came in sobbing gasps, but she could not speak, and only glared at him with the fierce expression of a tame domestic animal suddenly turned savage. Her flimsy gown had been torn during the short struggle, and her exquisite coiffure ridiculously disarranged. But she was in dead earnest and quite without affectation. The man thought of this, for as he thrust her rudely into the seat there was a gleam of something very like admiration in his eyes, where only contempt had been before. Never had she shown such spirit, and it became her well.

As a rule, she had shed tears, and her implorings were so familiar that he no longer heard them. She had yielded so easily, and for so many years, to the hold which he possessed over her, that he had long since ceased to look for any resistance from her. But to-day her eyes were dry and bright, and she faced him with a courage which she herself had not suspected existed in her. Of all characteristics, courage was the one which made the greatest appeal to the man's fierce gypsy temperament, and in his surprise at meeting with it in Adele his purpose wavered for an instant. Then his brow darkened again, and, releasing her, he stood before her threateningly. Never for a moment had he shown fear of not gaining his point; he knew that it was only necessary to bring his strongest weapon into play in order to win. Recovering his equanimity, he wiped his brow with a handkerchief of coloured silk, and then gazed smilingly down upon her as she sat with heaving bosom and hard, dry eyes.

"Now that we have had a little diversion, let us get down to business, my bird," said he pleasantly. "You can't inform against me without ruining yourself. That, I think is plain, ain't it? Besides, if you set

the cops on me, I can vanish so you couldn't find a track! On the other hand, I want that fifteen hundred at once."

She looked at him steadily, her eyes calling him unutterable things.

"Hurry up and say when, or I'll make it two thousand," he grinned. "Come to think of it, you'd better get that much anyway; I can use it."

For a moment or two she did not reply. What had she left? Her mental calculation was rapid enough. There was not much she could convert into cash. She thought of Janet. No; that was out of the question — as well go to her husband, almost. Unless she took the ornaments, some of which were very valuable, there was practically nothing. But they would be missed at once, and their absence would raise awkward questions. Finally she shook her head. It could not be done; she was at her wits' end. Then she said aloud:

"I cannot get it for you."

He saw that she meant it, and that only extreme measures could spur her on to greater effort. The time for his coup had arrived He leaned over her with a sinister leer.

"You can, and you will," he said, very slowly and distinctly, "or some one as well as you shall suffer for it. Yes —" as Adele started with horror, "I mean her."

"And you dared — you mean to tell me that you — "

"Just so," he replied drily.

"What do you want?" gasped Adele wildly.

"Exactly what I said," said he grimly — "two thousand dollars."

She seemed to see a rift in his proposal, and once again her courage and with it all her pent-up fury returned. But this time she dissembled. With abstracted gaze she rose and wandered to the window, holding aside the curtain an instant as she looked out. Slowly she turned and started to regain her chair, apparently crushed and submissive: but as she stepped forward her hand shot out and her finger was pressed hard upon the bell placed in the wall. The ringing downstairs, though faint, was clearly audible in the room, and at the sound Lasho straightened up, noiselessly backing toward the door, but with so malignant a glance fixed upon her that her old horror returned, leaving her curiously numb.

"I see you needs a lesson, my bird," he whispered. "I'm a man of my word and I mean what I said. It'll be a lesson you won't forget."

He turned the door handle silently, listened a moment, and slid out of the room, quickly closing the door behind him.

Then for the first time the full import of his threat dawned upon her distracted brain, and the numb feeling left her, only to be replaced by a horror that was almost physical torture. What did he mean — could it be that he meant to —— "Lasho!" she screamed, "Lasho, I did not think it possible that even you —I will get you the money! No, no, not *her*, for God's sake, Lasho!"

She fumbled at the door, and threw it open wide, half swooning with fear; but the man had vanished, and facing her in the doorway stood her husband.

XIV

RECORDS A RESOLUTION

EARLY on the morning following his arrival in Barrington Cecil sauntered from his boarding house (the inn had regarded him with suspicion and refused to entertain him), and lighting the first cigarette of the week looked about him for the post-office. In response to his inquiry for mail addressed to "Chamboyne" the young lady behind the grating handed him an envelope, smiling superciliously as she read the inscription upon it, and glanced from it to his shabby coat. She raised her eyebrows nearly to her massive pompadour in disdain of an evident impostor, and dismissed him by turning her back aggressively. The earl smiled to himself and opened the letter, which was from Lady Hylliary.

My dear, delinquent Cissy [she wrote]: I suppose it is my duty as your aunt by marriage to interfere in your affairs once more, and inform you that your note is absurd.

Of course a certain amount of personal freedom and independence is desirable, even for a man, but perhaps you, my dear, can have too much of it. I am just enough of a fool to be impressed with your title, which I reluctantly but perforce admit is much more impotent than my husband's and, therefore, rightly or wrongly, I believe you owe something to it: in other words, the getting of sufficient money to put a roof upon your house and the getting of an heir to inherit it and its debts. Forgive me if I remind you that you have been at considerable expense to come over here for the purpose of finding a rich wife — and now, *idiot!* you refuse to make the least effort to secure one!

My dear boy, I am going to be excessively personal and rude. Whatever woman is keeping you there in the country — for I know very well it *is* a woman: Prescott's charms are not so enslaving — don't, for goodness' sake, let her entangle you seriously unless she has money: you *cannot* afford it. And at your age a pair of apple cheeks and a buxom figure often lead one into going too far, and then the trouble is that, a little later in life, the apple effect takes on a pumpkin ensemble. She won't look the same at forty, Cissy — she'll look like two of her, take my word for it. If it's a lady, I apologize, but I don't believe it is, or you would have written me some details.

"Damn!" said Chamboyne at this point, and continued reading, after giving the paper a vicious shake:

I have a great many nice invitations for you, *mon cher*, some for Newport, and some nearer town. You will be the sensation of the season. I have been visiting a charming woman at East Hampton over the week-end and have discovered that she has two daughters and an indecent number of millions — dollars, not pounds, you understand — and it would be absurdly easy for you to marry either or both of these girls. They are very good form and pretty,

and their mother constantly implores me to get you here. My own choice for you would be Barbara Chichester, whom I hope you will meet later. But, in the meantime, come right down and look over these others. Now be a sensible Cissy!

Affectionately,

TOOTS.

P.S. I know you love to quoque, so, therefore, I reply to your postcript by the same token. What on earth are you drivelling about? It wasn't Barbara Chichester you saw with Adele at the docks: whatever got that bee in your Scotch bonnet? It was a suffragette reporter-girl, who cleverly hid her hand from Adele and made her bring her along to meet me, so as to write up my arrival.

This characteristic epistle brought up a vision of his usual existence that was far from alluring, coming as it did at a most inauspicious moment. Of course, Janet was a good sort, no one could deny that, but the rest ——? Why should people have such "duties" as marrying women they did not even know in order to build up a ramshackle old building which they would never live in if they could help it? Why beget a family in order to put it in the enviable position of having to do absolutely nothing for their entire lives and livelihood? The hard cynicism of his world smote him like a physical blow. Go to East Hampton at once? Why? Suddenly he realized that the past ten days had been the happiest of his life: even big game hunting was less interesting, because that was abnormal.

So was the daily round of a London season, he decided mentally. How odd that he had never realized it before! But then, he had not had much with which to compare it. "You owe something to your name," Janet had written. His name! What was it but a word — or was it *himself?* Prescott talked a good deal about one's duty to one's self. Allowing, then, that he owed such a duty, surely he was the best judge of its nature. Was it to return to the half-somnolent state from which Lolli had awakened him? To the deadly sameness, the routine of it, the living up to some one else's idea of him. Emphatically not!

"Come to think of it," he murmured, "I've *always* been bored until the last few days. No millionaire twins or Barbara Chichesters for me — no, sir!" he concluded with a Yankee twang.

Cecil was a simple person with clean, elemental thoughts and desires. With him things were or they were not. The gray, illusive etchings of life were unknown pictures to him, and, had he seen them, he would not have understood. To him things were true or they were not — clean, or dirty, and from the latter he turned instantly in utter disgust. "Of course," he would have said with wondering blue eyes. His mind

had developed slowly, maturing gradually but definitely; he was loath to accept anything new, but, once accepted, he assimilated it thoroughly. A lesson learned was never forgotten. Thus, when his situation among his kind and their status among the inhabitants of the earth presented itself clearly to his mind, he coloured neither side of the social question with tradition nor sentimentality, but weighed their merits in the honest scales of his unprejudiced vision. True nobility and true simplicity are identical — that is a platitude: but seldom had this time-honoured saying found so perfect an example of its proof as in Cecil Fitz-Williams. By some accident of training or inheritance he had attained to this altitude, shared only by a few of the earthborn, and, as a rule, earth supported; and a mode of living which would have warped most men into an artificial product of false culture and loose-ended ethics had failed to touch him. He had dozed through it all, awaking only at those rare intervals when a reality, penetrating the walls of the human corral, had brushed against him. And although his impulses came rather seldom, he never resisted them when they did. They were a part of life, and it would have appeared to him as

absurd to thwart them as to suppress an inclination to eat. But, as it happened, his inspirations were, as a rule, of a more romantic than dangerous nature, and so did him no harm.

Therefore he stood for some time on the busiest corner in Barrington, heedless of the clamour of its one trolley car which dashed proudly by, bespattering him with mud from its freshly watered track, and turned the question of his further action over in his mind as deliberately as he did the letter in his hand.

What was the use of obeying that command of caste? What was the substance of its claim upon him?

A thousand new questions suggested themselves, but he brushed them aside and concentrated upon the issue of the moment. Obviously, he did not wish to return to the dominion of Lady Hylliary. Indeed, with the sweet face of Lolli still fresh in his memory, and the call of the road in his blood, the idea of going back seemed monstrous, unnatural, almost a physical impossibility. But something must be done, as he could not remain in this ugly, provincial town forever. He might return at once to Prescott's, but, in that case, how was he to explain his absence to that keen, whip-tongued individual? He looked about

him in perplexity as though expecting that the dull row of brick buildings opposite would solve his problem for him. And they did offer a temporary solution, at least. Slowly the context of the thirty-foot sign on one of them began to force itself upon his inattentive mind:

PHINEAS J. BROWN'S EMPORIUM
WHOLESALE FURNITURE, CARPETS, RUGS, GLASSWARE.
OUTDOOR BENCHES AND CHAIRS A SPECIALTY.
RAIN OR SUN CAN'T TAKE THE PAINT OFF!
VISITORS WELCOME!

There was his answer staring him in the face. Slowly he tore Lady Hylliary's letter into bits and crossed the street.

Inside the Emporium were many articles besides those named upon the sign. Evidently Mr. Brown found it profitable to run a side line of candy, shoes, ribbons, and false hair. But, for the most part, the large, rambling store was heaped high with sticky new furniture of the very variety that had become so familiar to Cecil during the past few days. To justify the wording over the door, at the rear of the shop

were gathered three sofas upholstered in bilious-green plush, and a meagre assortment of pressed glassware upon a few dusty shelves. The main stock, however, was garden furniture, and a cheerful clatter from what was evidently the factory overhead bespoke more wooden seats and tables and clothes racks in progress of completion.

The asthmatic proprietor, Mr. Brown, was lounging across the candy case talking to a tall, middle-aged man with a goatee. With the exception of this man, the shop was empty of customers.

"Well," said the bearded one, concluding his bargain, "you send the benches round to the jail some time ter-day. Payment on delivery — Uncle Sam's money!"

The proprietor wheezed assent.

"All right, Bill," he said, "that suits me." Then he turned to Cecil.

The one addressed as "Bill," although his business appeared at an end, only withdrew as far as the end of the counter, and, resting his elbow upon it, fixed his gaze upon Cecil and adjusted himself in such a fashion as would enable him to get a full view of the newcomer and his purchasing, with the least possible personal discomfort.

Cecil stated his case: He had a large chair wagon which he wished to replenish. He had practically sold out during the last few days and he must purchase stock before going farther. Seeing Mr. Brown's sign, he had instantly been convinced that Mr. Brown, and no other, was the very man to supply him. He would like to buy and load immediately. Mr. Brown looked at him suspiciously because of the compliment. Did the fellow want credit? No, the fellow did not; he would pay cash. Mr. Brown looked more gracious and at once became attentive and full of practical suggestions. Was the wagon near? Could it not be sent for in order that the purchases might be put on in the order in which they were made? They could and should. A small boy was despatched for the team. He returned presently to inform them that the livery stable man refused to render them up without an order. Cecil went for them himself, and then the dickering began.

The buying of merchandise seemed almost as amusing as the selling of it, and the articles themselves were so nice — clean, strong, useful things, and not unbeautiful — beautifully practical, at any rate. The man with the goatee lounged about in a most friendly

manner, offering an occasional word of advice. He was a nice man with a mild manner and a cheerful voice. The shop cat took a great fancy to him, showering him with attentions, to which he occasionally responded by scratching her head. Cecil purchased green rockers and red rockers, red benches and green benches, camp chairs with cane seats, clothes racks, and a willow lounge; also red tables and green tables.

"We're carryin' a fine line of buckets this year," said the proprietor, "strong wooden ones with genu*ine* copper hoops. They're sellin' powerful well."

He held one up for inspection.

"Right-o," said Cecil, with delight. "I'll take twelve."

It was a beautiful thing, that bucket, with its white, smoothly planed surface and gleaming copper hoops — so strong, so work-worthy — so *real!* He quite adored it: was it not a symbol of simplicity? Let the crystal decanters of society make place!

He bought a great many things, and, toward the end, became rather alarmed that the bill might exceed his ready money; but, to his intense surprise, he found that half of the sum obtained from his sales was suffi-

cient to pay for his entire purchase. Why, at this rate, he would soon be rich!

It was noon before the wagon was loaded and the reckoning paid, but the man with the goatee had remained, and when Cecil descended the steps of the store, the man arose and followed him.

"Where are you goin' to eat, stranger?" he asked, affably.

"I don't know," replied the other. "It will be just a bite, and then I must be off."

"Well, there's Clyde's Imperial Café," said the man. "I generally eat there myself. Suppose we go there."

Cecil, nothing loath, consented, for the man had something winning about him, and his mild manners were certainly attractive rather than otherwise. So they led the wagon along the winding street until they came to the place mentioned. It was rather a dingy little building, but evidently the best eating place that the town afforded, and they entered, selecting a table near the door. At the curb outside the horses rested in noonday comfort, noses in feed bags.

"What did you say the name was?" asked the man when they had ordered.

"Fitz-Williams," replied Cecil, who had not previously said anything about it.

"New around these parts!" remarked his host. "I'm Bill Crawford, the sheriff."

"Indeed!" said Cecil. "Do the people here keep you busy, or is it a dull berth?"

"Well, of course the people that *belong* here are all right," said the arm of the law. "But we've had considerable trouble with the gypsies lately."

"Is that so?" Cecil returned politely. "They are rather a bad lot, I take it?"

"Some are," answered the gentle sheriff. "But some of them are as nice a set of folks as you'd see anywhere. There's a little gypsy girl that goes about here sellin' bonnets, and she's as straight as any lady in this town!"

He brought his fist down upon the table with a blow whose emphasis made the doughnuts jump in their china basket, and Cecil choked upon his mouthful of coffee.

"I expect that must be the girl I've seen along the road," he managed to utter with some degree of calmness when he had recovered his breath. "Has she been around here lately?"

The sheriff gave a slow chuckle.

"I saw her about four days ago, over near Jericho," he replied. "Guess it's the same girl, all right — every one notices her — big eyes, funny little cart, and crazy kind of name — Lolli Something — she's probably with the camp up the road by the fair ground now."

"Is there a tribe encamped near?" asked Cecil.

"Sure! They're the ones been givin' us all the trouble," was the response.

And he launched off into a detailed account of a vain search for stolen horses in which he had participated. According to Mr. Bill Crawford, the gypsies were the curse of the countryside and sly as foxes, for they had never yet been convicted, although there was little moral doubt of their guilt.

While he talked, Cecil was thinking rapidly. Could she have returned to her people? Had she been really an outcast of this tribe? and had they perhaps forgiven and received her back? Her manner, when speaking of the tribes, her reticence about her people, her hurt silence whenever he pursued the matter, all confirmed the notion that she was for some reason alienated from her kin. Perhaps she had been wrongly accused of something, and had been proved innocent,

and re-established among the wanderers. In that case, why should he not visit the camp and try to see her? What would follow upon such a visit he could only guess, but the need of her, which he had thought controlled, was mastering him again, and any chance of seeing her drew him like a magnet. He determined to make for the encampment as soon as he could free himself from the mild detention of his host.

A few inquiries elicited the fact that the gypsies were living about a mile from the town on the outskirts of the now deserted fair grounds, where, every autumn, the county cattle and crop show was held. The vagrants had only arrived that day, but were already making their presence felt. The women had been about the town telling fortunes all morning — there was one now!

Cecil looked eagerly to where the man pointed across the street, but it was only an old woman with a bundle of marketing stuff in her apron.

"These gypsies certainly are queer," concluded Mr. Crawford, as they rose to leave. "They have two names for everything, even their *own name*. This here crowd's called Hearne, but they give it another one than that among themselves — something for-

MICROCOPY RESOLUTION TEST CHART

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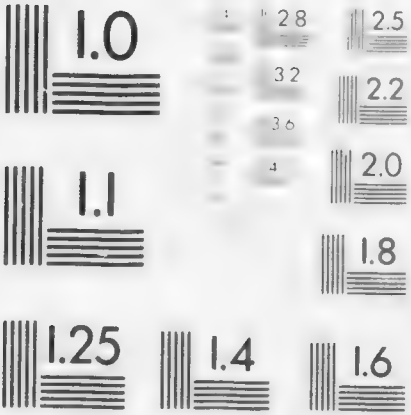

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eign-sounding — Balormengro, I think it is. My assistant, Jim, used to go about with them a lot before he reformed, and he says it means "hairy folk." There's three meanings to one word — can you beat that?"

Cecil wished he might hear more about the reformed Jim, but his anxiety to reach the camp was greater still; so he bade his new friend farewell, received from him the usual hearty invitation to call next year, and was off down the hard, white road, the horses trotting lustily, and their driver singing under his breath to the rhythm of their hoof beats.

XV

CONFIRMS AN OLD ADAGE ABOUT BLOOD

MEANWHILE the patriarchal family of Balormengro had twice shifted their abiding-place, having sojourned for the prodigious period of three whole days in a single spot. Like a gorgeous, many-hued caterpillar, the caravansary had crawled through the intervening country and up the steep side of a mountain to a favourite camping ground at Indian Leap. The roads along which they had passed were practically deserted, and the new site, on the brow of a towering cliff, had no neighbour save the splendid estate of Cuyler Stuyvesant, which spread for some three hundred acres at the foot of the mountain. Stuyvesant bred the finest horses in Berkshire, and the move was considered significant by the gossips of the tribe. Now it was that their language, indifferently preserved as it is, served them well, for though

few spoke the pure *zingarrijib*, all had command of what is called the "broken language," and, consequently, it was possible to discuss the various merits of the horses, right among the trainers and stablemen, without those lynx-eyed watchers being aware of what was going on.

"Twano gry, twano gry,
Coin se dickimengro?"
"Collico o was a Gorgio Rye,
Collico o's a Romny Chal"

"Little horse, little horse,
Who is your master?"
"Now he is a gentleman,
Now he is a gypsy."

So sang Delengro as he rode up from the valley, and paused a moment to gaze at a slender figure silhouetted against the golden sunset. It was Lolli, standing on the edge of the precipice where, a hundred years ago, an Indian princess had leaped to freedom and death from the hands of her white captors. The sight of her loneliness sent a pang to his susceptible heart, for he had been attracted by her at first sight, and in the few days of his guardianship she had grown very dear to him. This afternoon he had ridden forth on some errand, leaving her in the hands of Miriam and Adolphus, who had rejoined them before the removal. And now Delengro rejoiced for many reasons: his

errand had been successful; his healthy young appetite would be appeased by the wonderful cooking which was to be found at Miriam's campfire, where he was now a constant guest in his official capacity; but best of all, he would soon be in Her presence. So he sang with all the fervour that was in him, his clear voice floating high on the opal-tinted air.

The lean pony between his knees presently resumed the ascent of its own volition, and with a lissome pull of straining neck and shoulders, lifted him out of the shadow into the golden glory upon the mountain crest. The camp lay a little to the left of the steep roadway's *debouche*, and all between was steeped in the mellow light. A dusty track lay along the cliff's edge to where the first white tent reared its peak, but it was deserted save for a little cottontail rabbit which scurried into the brush from under the horse's hoofs. However, this emptiness did not deceive the youth, who searched the tangled growth of the cliff side for an opening as he passed slowly by. There it was at last, a masked trail between the wild rose brambles. He turned the horse's head along the narrow way, and in a moment stood beside her.

Lolli's pose was motionless as that of a statue, and the shell-like, projecting ledge on which she stood enhanced the effect. The great rolling braids of her hair caught and flashed back gleams of the setting sun from some mysterious depths of their dark loveliness, and the richness of her luxuriant colouring was accentuated, too, by the insidious light. Delengro gasped for pleasure as he came up softly. It was as if one of those carved and painted madonnas of the southern Spain he loved had been endowed with life by divine power! Ah, *mi Dibble* ——! At first he thought she was alone, but soon he espied Adolphus, at a little distance, who with thrifty hands was gathering some fragrant wild raspberries from their graceful vine: he was deeply absorbed in the task. Delengro slid from his horse, and, throwing the bridle over the beast's neck, stood beside her silently. She gave him a little half-smile of greeting, and then turned again to the scene before them. For a while they stood without a word, hushed by the beauty of the evening. The cliff dropped away abruptly for some several hundred feet of clean-cut rock, barren excepting a few hardy berry bushes which lodged here and there in the cracks. At its base ran a firm, white road, tree-

less and exact of outline, while on either hand beyond the broad expanse of the meadows rose two ranges of hills which spread away from this, their jointure, like the sticks of a half-open fan. The broadening valley ahead seemed interminable, and on its ample bosom lay a dozen townships, wide scattered, white painted, with thin spires rising tranquilly in their midst. In the distance, the horizon lay wrapped in mystery: those far ridges of hazy blue — were they in reality green-clad mountains? or were they but banks of distant cloud, their whiteness dimmed in the dying light? Nearer, the crest on which they stood threw a black shadow over the land — a thick, dark patch, duller by contrast with the light beyond, and shaped like a mighty hand whose index finger (the shadow of a tall, lonely pine tree perched high upon the rocks) pointed to the east. Within its radius of several miles lay the stock farm, parcelled out into square pastures, each enclosed by a neatly kept fence and hedgerow. From the heights, these fields, together with those distant and less regular ones belonging to the nearer farmsteads, resembled a huge chessboard on which the chessmen were the shadows of the neighbouring hills.

"What art thinking of, little flower?" asked Delengro gently, as he watched her wrapt eyes.

"My soul has been looking down upon its experiences," she said very softly, speaking as if to herself. "They have all been so small — so compact and hedged in, like those meadows there, and yet, while I was among them, they seemed so very wide — so very big! I did not know that they had boundaries. Now I have touched a real experience — am facing something that I have not manufactured in order to give myself a sensation — and all the others seem small — machine cut — line drawn and measured. I can see them all at once, they are so few!"

"And you, oh little flower! have paid a high price to learn only — that you know so very little," said Delengro.

"How do you know?" she asked in quiet question, but somehow without surprise that he should respond so easily to her mood.

"Who does not learn that lesson?" he replied with a shrug. "But, surely, you are not so bitter at being captive here: unless you loved us, why did you come? And since you came, why not stay?"

"I came because I could not stay away," she re-

plied in the Romany which now came to her more readily. "A call was in my blood, singing, singing the song of the open road, of the dust and the sun, of the camp fire and the steaming kettle, of the hush over the sleeping camp. It is like the memory of a dream, my knowledge of these things, which sweeps over me often, for a while driving away, almost completely, the memory of my daily life. It had a strange power over me which I could not resist, and so — I came."

"I care not what the old women say!" he cried in the same tongue. "Thou are an Egyptian; that I can swear. And has the call then died?"

"No," she replied in English, "I still hear it, but it is faint. I fear and fear what may be in store for me. I am loath to go, yet long only to escape; I am like two persons in one. Yesterday I longed for cool things, for gray thoughts and quiet voices: to-day I am gypsy, though I hate myself for it, and I am alive with love for gypsy things. 'Tatto ratti se len,'" she added, with a little sobbing laugh.

Her mind was in truth at that moment with Cecil and that first silver night when they talked together in the moonlight; but the boy beside her did not know

this, could not have guessed it, and to him these last words were as water to a thirsting man. Before she was aware of what was happening his arms were about her and they were swaying dangerously near the edge of the cliff, while he poured a torrent of passionate words into her ear.

"Aye, thou art right: they have hot blood," he whispered fiercely. "They love as the panthers of the desert, as the wild foxes of the wood. Thou art of the blood and I am of it; strong are our desires. My love will last thee unto death, and thou wilt be strong and sufficient unto me. Tremble not, O little sister of the beech tree! Repulse not the wishes of thy heart — nay, struggle not so fiercely. Listen! We will escape together at moonrise. I have this day hidden two lovely mares of the farm below; they were brown once, but to-night they will be black, and the white stars upon their foreheads will be blotted out. When we are far away, we will sell them for much money. Then we will cross the great water to sun-warmed lands of which I know. The *sher-engro* will make hard shift to find us there. Come now, little wild cat, not so fiercely — save that ardour for thy kisses."

And despite her resistance, which he took for coquetry, he forced her face toward him, and kissed her full upon the mouth, his lips clinging long and long. Then, with a desperate effort, she broke free of him, pushing him away with all her strength. She was successful in her intention, but the action sent him reeling; the footing on which they stood was narrow and, to her horror, he swayed backward and in an instant had disappeared over the edge of the cliff.

She looked wildly about for help, and screamed aloud, but there was no one in sight. Adolphus, when he saw Delengro appear to relieve him of his charge, had lounged off, and now there was no one nearer than the camp, almost a quarter of a mile distant. There was not a second to be lost and help from that quarter was clearly unavailable. Fearfully, with her head cooling rapidly and her nerves coming back into control with the necessity for action, she lay down and peered over the edge of the rock. There on a tiny ledge lay Delengro, one hand grasping a sage bush whose slender roots might give at any moment; the ledge itself was not sufficiently wide to hold him unsupported, and, oh, horror! his right arm hung limp at his side. He was about twelve feet below her.

"Can you hold on for a moment?" she cried. "Oh, you must!"

"Get some one, quick!" he answered.

Lolli sprang to her feet. What now? The peacefully grazing horse caught her eye. Over his neck hung an extra bridle, put there for no legitimate purpose by the owner's own confession, but what did that matter now? It was a most fortunate chance. Together with the one which the horse wore she might be able to make a strap of sufficient length to reach him. With fingers which she strove in vain to keep from trembling, she undid the fastenings and slipped the bridle from the pony's head, and, in another moment, had buckled the two together. The leather was strong and new, the straps broad and heavy, and she believed the improvised lasso to be long enough. Hastily running to the spot below which he hung, she dropped it over the edge. To her joy, it was more than ample in length, but a new difficulty at once presented itself: how was he to grasp it?

"It's no use," he said, after a painful attempt to use his injured arm. "I can't grasp it that way and I can't let go of the bush. Isn't there no one in sight?"

"No," she answered shortly, drawing up the strap

She saw that the roots of the little shrub were slowly giving way to the strain of his weight. "There's only one thing to do. Keep perfectly still: I'm going to lasso you."

"But you can't pull me up!" he said. "Can you fasten the other end to a tree? I'll try to pull myself up."

"You could not do it with only one hand, and there are no trees near enough; but I'll manage it. When the noose is under your right arm and fast around your shoulders, *make* that bush hold out till you hear me say let go— then let go! No time to argue now — do as I say."

Delengro's face was very white. It was evident that he was losing strength rapidly. Lolli slipped one end of her leather strap through a stout buckle on the other; she was glad to see that it was of sturdy gypsy workmanship — doubtless of Tornapo's or Sacki's — and, holding wide open the loop this formed, she threw it at the boy below. Twice she failed to catch him, and a deadly fear gripped her heart as she saw how he was slipping, but the third time she was successful and the noose fell into place, well down over his shoulders. She drew it tight, then, with the

other end in her hand, she whistled to the horse, using Delengro's call. The beast came at once, and it was an easy task to buckle the pierced end of the strap to the fastenings for his kit at the back of the saddle. Then she took hold of the bridle; her one dread was that the buckle on the saddle would not hold, but she did not dare to think of that now.

"Let go!" she cried, and urged the horse forward for a dozen yards, with familiar Romany calls.

The fortunate result was that a few moments later a very much bruised and shaken young man, who realized how near he had been to death, was sobbing out his gratitude upon the turf at her feet.

"For pity's sake, don't!" she said, laughing nervously, almost in a state of collapse.

"Oh, Little Red Cloak! Little Red Cloak! And I deserved to be let die since I so mistook you and forced myself upon you," said he humbly. "You are more wonderful for goodness than the Women of Wisdom: my life belongs to you!"

News travels rapidly in a gypsy camp. What one knows, all know; and so, before nightfall, every one was aware that Delengro had affronted the *pavno-mengri*, and that she had saved his unworthy life. He

himself told of it, making his part as despicable as possible, and exalting hers. He seemed to glory in the enormity of his offence, the exact nature of which, however, he did not explain, but his audience drew conclusions which satisfied them perfectly. Lolli was a goddess, a saint, what you will — a living monument to courage and ingenuity. But if he intended this reputation to help her, he made a mistake in creating it for her just then, for it removed from her side the very person whom she was shortly to need, and who could have been of the greatest service to her — to wit, himself.

Old Fennella, eldest of the Balormengro tribe, who had dressed the wounded arm with spices and strange mixtures, and afterward set it between two boards while she murmured incantations over it, met with Adolphus in the dusk as they both went to the spring for water. The old woman shook a hairy finger at him as she spoke.

"A love is born in the heart of Delengro," she said warningly. "His will is weak now as a woman after child-birth. A poor guardian he will be who himself covets the treasure intrusted to him! Take heed, oh, learned youth, and place another in his stead."

Fennella spoke but seldom, and then wisely, so Adolphus listened with care to the thin, cracked voice.

"Thy wisdom is as great as his folly, oh, venerable mother," replied he with unction, when she had done. "I will take measures for her protection at once."

The old woman grunted something unintelligible and went her way, grasping her pitcher and an apron full of herbs, with palsied hands; and when he fancied himself alone, Hosea Fear-God Smith struck an attitude and muttered in a hoarse voice:

"Ye Gods! A traitor in the camp! Methinks I'll find a way to foil his rambunctious schemes. But hold! I must go craftily, or all will be lost, e'en though I serve the king — God bless him — most faithfully!"

He frowned fearsomely at these last words, and, folding his arms, let his head drop upon his breast. The attitude was uncomfortable, and after a moment he grew tired of it, and perhaps hungry, too, for he suddenly ceased the melodrama which he loved to pretend was part and parcel of his life, and, breaking into a run, bounded toward his wagon like any school boy tired of play. From behind a tree old Fennella peered out.

"Paugh! Gorgio — fool!" she mumbled, and spat upon the ground. "They gives the ruling of the tribe into the hands of idiots and children, nowadays! And all because they can understand senseless, silly marks upon paper! There's more wisdom in one Roman head than in all the Gorgios put together. But oh, there is no Roman nation left, and all because of the likes of you!"

And she shook a skeleton fist in the direction which Adolphus had taken.

Meanwhile, the object of her vituperation had reached his wagon, and springing upon the steps called, "Mother, mother!"

In response to the call there was a sound of movement inside, and presently a sleek gray head appeared between the curtain flaps. It was the old lady from the desolate farm, who was also following a call — that of motherhood rather than the road.

"Well, Hosea Smith, what do you wish?" she queried smartly. "I'm just a-slickin' up a mite, well's I kin, in this here mean little buggy."

"'Tain't no buggy, ma," denied her son indignantly; "it's a regular palace on wheels. Come out ter supper; Miriam's got it all set."

Complaining and grumbling, the old lady allowed herself to be assisted down the red-painted steps to the ground, and shortly the two joined the group already seated around the rough board and trestles which served for a table — a concession to the older woman's habits of life which Hosea had insisted upon.

"What's fer supper?" demanded his mother, sniffing suspiciously. "No more o' thet peculiar-lookin' dog-meat stew like we had fer dinner, I hope?"

She was a strangely incongruous figure among the brilliant picturesqueness of the other costumes. Her hair was drawn back tightly from her forehead so that her eyebrows seemed in immediate danger of joining it, and was plastered to an incredible smoothness. Her meagre little person was enclosed in the stiffest of faded blue calico dresses, and a huge apron of immaculate whiteness girt her waist. On her nose perched a large pair of bone-rimmed spectacles containing plain glasses. Mrs. Smith had nothing the matter with her eyes, but she declared it was not dignified for a woman of her age to go without "specs."

"It was not dog which we had for dinner, dear Mrs. Smith," pleaded Lolli, passing her some corn cake

fresh from the hot ashes. "It was rabbit, as I told you before, cooked as only Miriam can do it."

"It *tasted* and *smelt* like dog," replied Mrs. Smith, in what was intended to be a non-committal tone.

"Have a piece of *balo*," said her daughter-in-law, solicitously.

"What is it?" asked the old lady of Lolli, sniffing again.

"It is bacon," replied Lolli; "see, it is very nice. And I have some tea here. The others do not like it, but you will, I know," and she proffered a large blue cup.

"Well, now, that looks almost Christian!" declared Mrs. Smith grudgingly, as she took it. "An' now that you've got me here, Hosea Fear-God, and seein's I 'ain't a-mind ter starve, reckon mebbe I'd better learn yer wife ter make pie an' cake, 'n beans 'n decent things like them."

All this was said to her son. Since her reluctant arrival she had not condescended to address Miriam directly so much as once; all her remarks were made either to Hosea or Lolli. The others she evidently regarded as a species of savage, part devil, part flesh, who could not understand English, even though they sometimes addressed her in it.

"I shall be pleased to learn the strange dishes," said Miriam with that humility which the gypsy women always display toward their elders. "It is an honour to keep the venerable mother."

"Well, I dunno about *keepin'*," snapped Mrs. Smith in instant reponse, but directing her look to Hosea. "I dunno about keepin'. You got the *cow!*"

Which was quite true, that ancient animal having been transferred to the caravansary at the same time that its mistress had been persuaded to join her son's paths during the summer months, to remain while Miriam was contemplating the gift to her of a grandchild. A dispute as to the value of the beast now arose between mother and son, during which Delengro, who had been sitting beside Lolli in silent adoration since the meal began, now leaned over and under cover of the uproar asked:

"May I have your hearing, little flower?"

She nodded.

"I will not say that there is sorrow in my heart for what I did," he began, "for that would be an insult to your charm. But that I's grieved at having wounded you is true. Will you forgive me, then?"

"I have no ill-feeling harboured against you, O

mighty horseman," she smiled. "We are brother and sister; better, we are friends."

"And no more — never?"

She shook her head.

"Nay, only as I have said," she replied. And with the words came a rush of longing for the red-headed vendor of chairs, who had doubtless forgotten her by now.

He must have read the meaning of the flush which spread over her smooth cheek, for he made an involuntary movement with his bandaged arm toward the place in his belt where the knife lay hid. The twinge of pain which followed cut short the curse upon his rival, but, after a breath or two, he said in a low voice:

"So there is another who delights your heart?"

Her colour mounted still higher, but before she could deny the allegation the nasal voice of Mrs. Smith projected itself at her like a missile. The strong tea had evidently thawed the old lady out to a considerable extent.

"I wuz a-thinkin'," she was saying, "thet as soon as I git acquainted around here, or wherever we be when I git ter know these folks I've took up with —

against my will, dear knows — I wuz thinkin' it would be real nice ter git up a regular prayer meetin' ter be held at this wagon onet a week. 'Twould be kinder sociable. I could read the Gospel an' give a talk ——"

"Now, look a-here, ma," roared Hosea, springing to his feet in alarm, "don't you dast ter try none o' thet around here! Ef yer ain't had enough prayin' during the past sixty year ter last yer th' rest of yer life, yer kin go ter church whenever you've a mind ter. But don't yer come over with any of thet while yer in camp, or yer noble son an' his royal wife 'll disappear an' yer won't never see 'em again! Prayin's all right in its way, but it won't go down here. You got ter *live* instead, if yer a-goin' ter stop with us!"

"Hosea F. G. Smith!" exclaimed his horrified mother, "this is whut come: o' livin' among the heathen! Folks kin do both, live and pray, lemme tell *you!*"

"Well," said he positively, "yer know how ter pray, all right enough, I'll allow thet. But yer gotter put it outer yer mind fer a spell an learn ter *live* afore I let yer try ter make a combine outen the two."

How far into a doctrinal controversy the subject might have been carried can only be surmised, for, at this juncture signs of an agitation which had apparently

been moving the farther end of the camp for some moments past began to make itself felt close by. Men and women were hurrying from tent to wagon; horses were being led in from the pasture by owners who had turned them out scarce five hours since; lanterns were being lit and swung like glow-worms beneath the farther wagons: there was every token of a sudden breaking of camp. Like a slow fire, they could see the news, whatever it was, spread from tent to wagon, from wagon to tent, and as it reached each one, the owner instantly bestirred himself for departure. Children wailed at being awakened, and the many dogs began their trail song.

"What kin hev happened?" cried Adolphus. "Why 'aint I bin informed?"

Almost as he said it, Sacki, the harness maker, who was evidently the courier, came rushing up. He had just dismounted and still wore his spurs. Upon seeing Adolphus he went to him at once.

"I spoke with Lasho ten miles to the south," he cried in Romany. "The police have found the gray horse from Lenox, and are coming here to look for the others. It will be counted against us if we are found near the *Gorgio's* farm of horses, and he bids us travel

on at once to Barrington. Delengro is to take the new mares back into the mountains to Jericho with the help of a boy or two, and the girl is to be taken to the deserted farmhouse near Lee, for safe keeping."

"But why," demanded Adolphus, much agitated by the news but swelling into his brigadier-general manner with the effort to appear in authority, "why can't she go with us?"

"Why you gumny!" cried the man, "because the police might find *her* here, which is worse than dyed horses! Don't you know she's a *rawnie*, a rich gentile, for whom he expects to get a big ransom?"

"Know! Of course I know," retorted Adolphus. "Whut does he want done with her, did yer say?"

"I, with others, will take her to the house of which I spoke, to await him there," replied Sacki. "It is his word!"

Lolli, who had been listening anxiously to what had gone forward, gave Delengro an agonized glance at this point, and he, understanding it, thrust himself forward so that Sacki might see his injured arm.

"Look, brother, I am hurt," he exclaimed. "Let me go with you to guard the girl, and send a stronger man to lead the horses."

"Are you a woman?" growled the other. "Get to the work that I gives you."

It was an inauspicious moment to press the matter further, and Delengro gave Lolli a piteous glance as he slunk off. She moved in the direction of her cart.

"Never mind that, young woman," said Sacki, who seemed authorized to usurp the leadership of Adolphus in this particular. "You'll go a-horseback."

XVI

TAKES US UPON A NIGHT JOURNEY

THE preparations for departure went on with incredible swiftness, but amid them Lolli stood dazed, her heart sick with foreboding. Fires were being extinguished, rubbish concealed beneath the hedges, and, as far as possible, all traces of the place having been recently inhabited were removed. If the constables could be deceived into believing that no one had been there lately, so much the better: such a circumstance was greatly to be desired.

The foremost wagons had already begun to move when Delengro passed her with a whispered word. She tried to be brave as he bade her, and as he approached Sacki and Adolphus, who stood together, she watched him eagerly. Her champion had spoken, in a very low voice so that she was unable to hear his words, but she could easily distinguish from his gestures that he was making a further effort to

accompany her. He looked very like a faun as he stood there in the dancing firelight, and the odd thought came to her that perhaps he was one, or, at any rate, the very near kin of those wild woodland creatures that bowed so easily to her will. Yes, surely, his ears were pointed at the tips — or was it only the uncertain light? Presently he finished his dissertation, and Sacki's voice arose distinctly above the noise and confusion.

"The boy do seem in pain," he said to Adolphus. "Perhaps it is better to let him accompany me to the farm. See, he can't use his arm."

Adolphus looked Delengro over without speaking for a moment, and spat meditatively.

"Naw," he exclaimed at last; "he's soft on the giri; that's the reason he wants ter go along. He kin take the horses all right, and better than most, if he is busted up a leetle!"

His words carried force, for Sacki nodded gravely.

"It is of no use to plead, Delengro," he said. "Make haste with your horses now; be off. *Jal Duvvelskey!*"

The young man turned away dejectedly, and as he did so, Sacki added:

"Aye, thou wert right, brother! See! he goes to her at once."

Delengro had crossed directly to where Lolli waited to have him confirm what she had already overheard. He approached her timidly but unfalteringly, just as the river mouse had done on that free, sun-warmed morning which seemed so far away, so very long ago, when she had bathed in the cool water near Gomorrah. With the curious perversity of one in danger, she remembered the trivial incident of the mouse quite distinctly, but was unable to focus her attention on her present plight; and of Delengro she thought not that he was a poor sort of knight errant, but only that his ears were pointed.

"I am but one; they are many," he was saying sadly, spreading his hands in a gesture which included all of the Balormengri, "What can I do? They will watch me now as if they were cats and I a bird; from this moment I am as truly a prisoner as thou!"

He dropped his hands with a gesture of despair and stood regarding her with pleading eyes. Then, much as she had released the mouse, she let him go, with a gentle, absent-minded word. Later she saw him mounted, in the thick of a struggling throng of led horses.

Surely this must be a nightmare, it was so strange

and fantastic! These crowding, moving shadows, these fitful lights, these hoarse cries! She would awaken presently to find herself sleeping beside her cart in some hillside grove, with the comforting knowledge that Cecil lay not fifty yards away. Ah! he would not have failed her in this crisis — he, the straight, strong, clean-cut Scotchman! If only he knew — but he did not know! Perhaps he had forgotten her; but no, a thousand times no! That could not be! She recalled the look in his eyes that had glowed so steadily as they talked together, or as he watched her silently. Surely one who had looked at her so could not forget readily — so soon. From that moment on she never doubted him again, and in a great burst of light she recognized at last that he was the centre of her universe — that she loved him!

With the realization of this everything else sunk into oblivion; a wonderful exaltation took possession of her. Her perilous situation, her past sufferings, all that might lie before her shrank into insignificance. All the tenderness with which she had charmed the wild things, all the witchery which aided her in reading the woodlands' secrets, all the golden sunlight which he had absorbed, now stood revealed in their true

capacity, as factors in a lesson of which this was to be the climax! And if she loved so strongly and her need of him was so great, surely he must hear her voiceless cry over the blue mountain crests, over the mist-shrouded valleys — wherever he might be and come to her in her extremity!

In a vague way she realized that some one led her to a saddled horse, and bade her mount. There were men all about, and the restless feeling of impatient beasts tingling to be off — on the road. A sinewy hand, knotted and covered with coarse black hair, reached out and clicked a leading string to either side of her creature's bit. A rough voice gave an order in Romany, and presently the horses were shuffling down the dark, stony mountain road toward the valley. Having her hands free, she grasped the pommel to steady herself. Slowly and cautiously they made the descent, for the moon was cloud hidden and they carried no lights.

Lolli sat dumbly, careless of possible accident, and calling, calling her mute message to the man she loved.

After an interminable period the firm ground of the level valley road was reached, a dim, white smudge that maintained its vanishing point ten feet ahead

of them as they advanced upon it. Besides the prisoner, there were four members of the little cavalcade which wended its way so mysteriously through the night, and all of these were men. At the head of the party rode Sacki, taciturn and grim, upon his lean white stallion. On either side of the girl was Pedro the Tall, and One-eyed Tornapo. The former was ostensibly a tinker by trade, but had never been known to work at tinkering, save when a scion of the law made the camp a casual visit; none the less, he appeared to be a man of means, for had he not several fine horses in his possession? Tornapo was a surly youth, with thick, repulsive-looking lips and heavy limbs, whose seeming flabbiness nevertheless concealed great strength. And bringing up the rear came Wentzlow, the blacksmith, a gigantic man with a long, curling beard and arms with steel muscles. His long legs hung stirrupless, like great flails, on his horse's flanks, and his feet nearly touched the ground. One would expect from his appearance that he would burst into song at any moment, for there was an operatic air about him; but, as a matter of fact, he was the reverse of cheerful, and was said to have had a hand in most of the *sub-rosa* proceedings of the tribe.

Such was the escort which bore Lolli along: a formidable one, truly, for so helpless a captive. It was evident that Adolphus had formed a considerable respect for her ingenuity and resourcefulness, since he set so many strong men to guard her. But she gave very little thought to the company in which she found herself, nor indeed to anything but how to get some word to Cecil. There was but one chance of reaching him, a slight one, and a feeble thing to pin many hopes to, but still the only one which lay within possibility of accomplishment, and that was by means of her *patterin*. They had talked of it so often, its meanings and its uses, that she felt sure his eye would be alive to see it. But how should she manage to lay it? and, above all, even if she was able to do this much, what was his route? Would it be the way that they were now travelling? She could only hope so, blindly, but with all the strength of her being, and vigilantly watch her opportunity.

The first turning which the party took out of the valley road was a cross lane less than a quarter of a mile from the camp at Indian Leap, and the branch of the road to which they turned their backs led to Barrington, not many miles away. As they rounded

the corner in the complete darkness one of the horses stumbled, and before his rider could jerk him to his feet, the others had sidled, terrified, into the road bank. The foliage hung low, and as the leaves of the tree under which she was carried grazed her face, Lolli put out a warding hand and plucked two little branches. Fortune be praised! it was maple; her own *patterin*. Here was her wished-for chance. In the confusion of the moment, she had broken a leaf on one of her little branches, so that it hung limply, and dropped it. As to the position in which the *patterin* lay upon the ground, she knew that a twig dropped by the broken end falls with the leaf end pointing forward; and, dropped from the leaf end, will reverse itself. She had let it slip from between her fingers in the former fashion and knew that by rights it should point in the direction which they were taking: but had the horses trampled it out of kilter? or buried it in the dust of the road with their dancing hoofs? The second little twig she held hidden beneath her cloak.

On the road into which they had turned, the overarching trees cast impenetrable shadows. So intense was the darkness that they seemed to be riding into a material thing, a substance the parting of which

could be felt as they cleft it. The road being quite invisible, the horses were left to pick it for themselves. Not a breath of wind was stirring, and the silence was as intense as the darkness, only the horses' smothered footsteps breaking the stillness. There had been no rain for some time, and the dust lay thick over everything. After a while the blackness ahead took on a grayer hue, and the troop increased its speed. Evidently they were about to emerge upon another highway. And, sure enough, at the end of a hundred yards, they came upon it, turning to the northeast, and once again the ring of steel upon the hard, beaten ground was heard.

Lolli dropped her second twig of maple at the corner. How much farther had they to go? Too great a way for the poor little signs to be of much service she feared. Where would she be able to gather material for more? This new road was wide and unshaded, they were making swifter progress now, and any unusual action upon her part would be noted instantly. On and on they went. Several small roads were passed, but still they kept to the main one. They passed no houses, and Lolli argued that they were taking a carefully chosen route.

When they had covered a distance of several miles, Sacki gave orders to halt, his low, gruff voice grating harshly upon the long silence. Had they arrived, she wondered. Straining her eyes, she peered into the darkness but could distinguish nothing. The men had dismounted and were leading the horses forward. Then a soft splashing caught her ear; they had stopped to water the horses at a wayside trough. The tired beasts drew in the sweet water with deep-breathed content, standing in a row with bent necks, and from a rill above the basin Sacki drew a brimming cup and passed it to her.

With a gesture she refused it, and as he turned his back she reached swiftly upward. She had been watching her moment; the tree under which the trough had been built was a maple.

Old Sacki gave the word and they were off again. Still they kept to the main road, without as yet passing a house. Then, from the distance, came a familiar, whirring sound. On the instant every one was on the alert. Sacki turned to Pedro.

"Is there a road hereabouts we can turn into?" he asked.

"None," was the curt reply.

The leader looked about him in perplexity. On either side rose gently sloping barren fields, fenced in from the road. To enter these would be more difficult and dangerous than remaining where they were. Yet, unquestionably, they ought to avoid the approaching automobile. There was no time for action, however, and it would be necessary to risk being seen and perhaps stopped. Hope caused Lolli's heart to leap at the thought, but in vain. In one instant the lighted car rushed into view, and in another it was gone!

So great was her disappointment that when, a few moments later, her jailers led into a side road, she almost forgot to lay her *patterin*. Not until they had gone ten paces, did she recollect and drop the broken twig. Was it too far from the highway to be noticeable? But what if he did not answer her silent call, and come that way? She dared not think of it! Closing her eyes, she shuddered. Ah, he must see it, *he must!* Again her heart sent forth that voiceless cry to compel him.

The road which they were now traversing was oddly familiar to her, yet she was not able at first to place its exact location. There were fir trees on the

right, gaunt, ever-whispering giants, standing courageously upon the steep mountain side. Their fragrance filled the night. Where was it? They were ascending a steep incline, narrow and winding, and from which no roads branched away. Presently, she made out a rude log railing on the left, and far below, the murmur of the river. Then she knew where she was. If they went far enough along this shelf of a road they would come to where the green-ribbon path led to the pool beside which she had camped one day earlier in the summer; and, though she did not know it, it was here that Cecil had first seen her in the guise of a water nymph.

The Pine Mountain road was a dangerous one even by daylight, being so narrow that two wagons had great difficulty in passing. On the one side the pine trees rose steeply, their horny roots projecting in places where the road had been dug out of the bank; and, on the other hand, the canyon fell sheer some hundreds of feet to the river, its treacherous ledge guarded only by the fragile, ill-kept railing. Alarming, though very beauiful, by day, to-night, with its murmuring trees and water, its unseen dangers, and in company of her grim guardians, it seemed a very

inferno! The desolation of the open country, when at length they reached it, seemed cheerful by comparison, and she drew a long breath of relief when the pass was behind them.

When they rode by the turning to Bethel she knew in a flash where they were going. Many a time had she passed that dreary old brick house, set back from the road among its untilled acres, and situated ar from any other dwelling! "Deserted farm," they had said back at the camp at Indian Leap. But at the time the words had meant little beyond the fact that such a place was to be her prison.

The house was a large two and a half story building of red brick, an unusually pretentious place to have been built so far from any town. There were numerous outbuildings, too cowsheds, sheep corral, barns, and stables, but these also were in an advanced stage of decay. The house had four chimneys, and a colonial doorway that had once been painted white. The windows were for the most part broken, and one of the chimneys had fallen in, making a gap in the roof. Even the bricks, in places, had become loosened, giving the place a very tottering appearance, and the white soapstone of the doorstep was over-

grown with moss and weeds, while the wooden wing was a mere skeleton.

Such was the dreary place to which they had ridden through half the night. As they came upon the ghostly gate posts of soapstone, with one accord the party halted. Pedro swung from his saddle at a word from Sacki, while the rest kept their seats. There was a short, muttered consultation, and the Spanish gypsy nodded and slipped away into the darkness. The rest waited in silence, and the horses breathed heavily.

It seemed to Lolli that they waited for hours before any other sound was heard. When Sacki moved slightly in his saddle the leather cracked loudly. The beating of the girl's heart almost stifled her. The open road had been frightful enough in company with these four ruffians; but now — in there she must go — alone with these men who were little more than beasts. God in heaven! how could she escape? What would they do? The blood beat in her ears and she swayed slightly in the saddle. A grimy hand was thrust out to support her, but at its touch she grew suddenly strong, and sat erect again. Then Pedro's voice signalled softly, and Sacki urged his

tired horse ahead. The others followed suit, jerking the leading strings of her mount as they did so. The animal started forward. Then she let fall her last precious bit of maple, directing it carefully so as to point inward, and passed with the others between the white posts, and up the almost obliterated, overgrown driveway.

XVII

IS EVEN MORE MELODRAMATIC THAN CHAPTER XIII

JOHN COLTON CHICHESTER was hastening home from his office through the glare of the noonday heat.

It was the morning after that on which Lasho Balormengo had culminated his interview with Adele in such a dramatic manner, and now the cause of Chichester's early return was due to the fact that Lasho had paid him a visit not half an hour since.

The gypsy had presented himself in a mild and subdued manner, bringing out a copy of that same notice in the newspaper advertising her loss which Lolli had read with such amazement in the camp. He then declared that he had information concerning her whereabouts, and claimed the reward which the notice offered. For an additional sum of substantial proportions he was prepared to induce his friends

(so he said) to bring the girl to a place where Chichester himself could take her in charge. A storm of cross-questioning and threats on the part of Chichester failed to impress Lasho in the least. He positively denied knowledge of the actual spot where she was at that instant, but once possessed of sufficient money, he felt confident of buying the additional information needed. Further pressure by Chichester elicited the statement that the gypsy had been purposely kept in ignorance in order that he might the more safely come to Chichester with his proposition: so under those conditions nothing could be gained by arresting him. Lasho could be a very passable actor when occasion demanded, and he succeeded in convincing Chichester that there might be truth in his statement. After some farther parleying it was arranged that Lasho should receive half the price agreed upon in cash at once, and at the end of forty-eight hours deliver Barbara into Chichester's hands at a place appointed, there to receive the remainder of the money. The necessary sum paid, and all possible precautions taken, Chichester ordered his motor and hastened home to inform his wife of all that had transpired.

The avenue stretched its hot, dusty length ahead

for a mile or two, and through its summer desolation Chichester reached his house without much delay. Lang took his hat and stick at the door.

"Where is Mrs. Chichester?" asked the banker.

"In the library, sir," responded Lang. "She was looking for you, sir, and, begging your pardon, I think" here he seemed to suddenly realize that butlers are not supposed to think, and ended in a changed tone — "I think she's still there, sir."

When Chichester entered the library the cause of Lang's almost unrestrainable communicativeness was at once apparent, for Adele was walking distractedly up and down the room, all disheveled and distraught.

"Adele! what is the matter?" cried her husband hurrying to her.

Mrs. Chichester turned to him with outstretched hands. Her face was haggard, and she was scarcely able to speak.

"For God's sake, tell me; what is it?" he implored.

"Barbara!" she managed to gasp with white lips.

"Not ——?" began Chichester.

'It was the telephone message," she said hoarsely, "from *him!* I had no more money and he threatened it, but I could not believe him at first, and when I

called to him that I would get the money he was gone, and now ——"

She broke off suddenly, seemingly unable to continue.

"I cannot understand," declared Chichester. "In mercy Adele, explain."

"I *am* explaining!" she cried. "Don't you see? He called me up on the telephone just a few moments ago, and told me that he had seen you and got money from you on the promise of delivering Barbara to you to-morrow. And then — O God in Heaven!— and then he said he'd get even with me for not paying also, and that he was going back — going back to ruin Barbara — my little girl. Oh, Jack! how shall we save her? What can we do — oh!"

"Adele, calm yourself, and tell me who is this man?" demanded Chichester, his own emotions controlled only by a supreme effort of his iron will.

She stood up and faced him squarely, striving vainly to get some hold on herself.

"I will confess everything," she said, breathlessly. "It is time — oh! more than time, that you were told. Jack, you *must* save her; this threat of Lasho's is even more terrible than you have guessed: he does not know it, but he is Barbara's father. He is unut-

terably wicked, and he has been blackmailing me for years; he is capable of anything. Ah, Jack, she must, she *must* be saved somehow! You will manage it, won't you? Ah, say you can, you are so——"

She paused abruptly, realizing that her husband's eyes burned with an ominous fire. Then, as she saw the look of anger and contempt upon his face, and the too easily named assumption there, as yet unspoken, she realized too late, with a slowly enveloping, sickening despair, what she had implied regarding herself. In the pressing need of the moment her one thought had been for Barbara, and she scarcely knew what she was saying while she spoke. But now she knew, and with the realization a paralyzing blackness crowded upon her senses. The room seemed to whirl about madly, and then came — oblivion.

For a moment John Chichester stood looking at the unconscious figure of his wife as she lay huddled upon the floor, and then, turning, he hastened from the room without a backward glance. Though two lives were ruined, the innocent cause must not be made a victim: Barbara must be saved at all costs.

XVIII

RECORDS A BATTLE OF WITS AND A PREDICTION

TO RETURN to the stiflingly hot afternoon on which the earl drove his new load of furniture out of Barrington in the direction of that spot where, as the sheriff had told him, the gypsies were camped.

In the east, soft banks of treacherous-looking clouds were piling up; later there might be a welcome rain, but at present the dust was so thick that, after a few enthusiastic moments, Cecil was obliged to stop his song and content himself with listening to its refrain beating mutely in his head.

Maintaining the rate at which they set out, the horses quickly covered the short distance between the town and the gypsy camp, which lay spread in all its gorgeousness upon the level stretch of dull plain. Being in the near vicinity of a large *Gorgio*

community, the Romans had established themselves rather differently from the habit they affected when living under less alien observation. Certain perquisites, certain accessories, which the Gentiles had created a demand for, had been added; without these the townsfolk refused to find the Romans interesting, and, therefore, fortune-telling tents, with mystic-looking, meaningless pothooks and hieroglyphics painted upon the walls, had been erected; coloured flags or fringes framed the entrances, and interiors were darkened to a suitable degree of mystery. The women went about — those at least who *dukkered* professionally — clad in a fantastic garb which, while its foundation was pure gypsy, was so overladen by productions of New Jersey Orientalists as to be almost unrecognizable to the tutored eye. Others wore bright-hued kimonos, too palpably of Occidental conception, and topped off the loose sleeves and open neck most ridiculously with Romany bandannas and earrings. This excess of costuming, exaggerated to suit the popular taste and the traditional idea of a gypsy's appearance, was in vogue everywhere. But despite these preparations for a traffic concocted for transient profit, the majority continued at their trades,

even those who had none feigning an occupation while they remained near the town, probably from fear of the mild scrutiny of Mr. Bill Crawford, who was known to have taken on a certain vigour when he discovered prosperous-looking Romans, with no visible means of support, lounging about the neighbourhood.

At this hour, however, there were no visitors at the camp, and most of its inhabitants appeared to be asleep. Scrawny dogs lay sprawled in the thin shade of the tents, and half-clad children lounged listlessly at the wagon ends. Two old women, their aprons filled with herbs, plodded along in the dusty silence, and behind them followed a third, burdenless, who muttered incantations in ancient Westphalian Romany as they passed to the tent of a sick woman. A barefooted boy led a limping gray horse by a bridle rope to the water trough which stood under a gnarled wild cherry tree. Other than this there was little movement among the many souls who lay there. Above the gaudy wagons and festooned tents, in dust and disorder, the hot air shimmered and flickered in gauzy waves. All over the plain, too, stretched the quivering canopy of heat, and high above the transient village hung two large birds with widespread, slow-

wheeling wings. Out of the heat and the stillness arose a song, plaintive and rich toned, from a strong, young, male throat; it floated wide in the motionless air, tuneful but sad, rising, falling, with rhythmic cadence as though in harmony with some mechanical task. It was a Romany love song:

"I choose as pillows for my head
  Those snow white breasts of thine.
I choose as lamps to light my bed
  Those eyes of silver shine.
O lovely maid, disdain me not,
  Nor leave me in my pain:
Perchance 'twill never be my lot
  To see thy face again'"

It was Delengro who sang, in full enjoyment of his own melancholy plight. At sight of Cecil, who drew up near him, he broke off the end of a melodious repetition and abruptly inquired what he wanted.

The gypsy boy had matured perceptibly during the past twenty-four hours, and presented a rather worn figure with his tired face and his bandaged arm in its gay sling. With his uninjured hand he had been looping scarlet cord about a bridle ornament. His expression was grave, and odd little lines, delicately traced, had appeared over night at the corners of his eyes and of his faun-like mouth. In response to his question, Cecil replied:

"I am looking for a girl called Lolli Plashta."

The look which swept across the gypsy's face at these words filled Chamboyne with surprise. Astonishment, suspicion, and alarm, and, could it be? hate, followed each other swiftly. Then, almost as suddenly as the look had come, it vanished, leaving the boy stolid, impassive.

"I know no such person," replied Delengro, indifferently. "All here are ourselves — all Balormengri. I do not know the name you says."

"But do you know the names of all the people in the camp?"

"I tell you they have only one name — Balormengro," was the answer.

"Do you mean to tell me that these hundred or so individuals are all called that?" demanded Cecil increduously. The young man's strange expression at his first inquiry had excited the Scotchman's suspicions. The gypsy was plainly lying when he declared that Lolli's name meant nothing to him. A few pressing questions appeared to be in order.

"But, of course!" said Delengro, a trifle impatiently, as if the subject bored him: "we are all relations - all *ourselves* — there are none beside."

"Are you very sure that the girl I am seeking is not here?" persisted Cecil, who would have made a poor diplomat.

"Unless it be that she is visiting from another tribe," replied Delengro. "I will ask further if you wishes."

"If you please," said Cecil, shortly.

Delengro dropped his work and sauntering to a near-by tent he entered, and in a moment or two emerged with another man, an old fellow who bore an air of authority. They appeared to consult together, and then the elder man stepped forward with a courteous gesture.

"I's afraid there is no one here of the name you seeks," he said, addressing Cecil politely. "Perhaps you made a mistake in the name. What did you wish of her?"

"An odd question that," thought Cecil, but aloud he said:

"I am merely a friend who would like to speak with her."

At these words an ugly spark sprang up in Delengro's eyes. Who was this stranger? What did he want with Lolli, the golden-eyed? Was he her lover? and was it because of this *Gorgio* that she had refused

to listen to his addresses? It must be so! Well, he for one would do nothing to assist the handsome Gentile, who should leave as ignorant as he came — aye, even if this course were costly to Lolli! To steal her from the *sher-engro* for himself was one thing; but to assist a rival to the same end — a successful rival at that — was quite beyond the scope of his altruism.

Meanwhile the second gypsy and Cecil were still parleying, the former assuring the latter that the family name embraced all. At its third or fourth repetition, it began to dawn upon Cecil that he had heard it elsewhere, and in connection with his little peddler girl. Where had it been? Yes, from Crawford; but at some other time, too, longer ago — by Jove, yes! That great, ugly fellow whom he had thrashed for annoying her had announced his name as Balormengro, the hairy one. He had shouted it as a threat, and it was plain that he would make good his intention of revenge when opportunity should offer. Perhaps it had already arisen, and she had fallen into the man's power! Cecil instantly concluded that these gypsies knew more about Lolli's whereabouts than they intended to reveal: very possibly she was right

here in the camp, held, maybe, against her will; or worse, had already received an injury at the hands of that evil man, which his people were helping him to conceal. The thought made his blood run cold, and he determined not to leave until every possibility of discovering her had been exhausted. His spirit was grim with determination, but he was outwardly calm as he asked:

"Might not some of the women know? It would be well to inquire, for I have special reasons for believing that she is here."

Delengro and the other man exchanged a swift glance. A little crowd had gathered curiously about, roused from their *siesta* by the advent of the visitor; and though they stood gaping with apparent lack of understanding, yet an indefinable current, electric in its nature, held them together.

They *all* knew, thought Cecil wrathfully!

"We will ask old Fennella," said one. "She knows all that happens in the tribe; nothing escapes her. Let us go to her tent."

Cecil got down from the cart and followed Delengro, in response to this suggestion, leading his team; and the rabble, now augmented by a considerable

number of children and dogs, trailed after. All seemed anxious to be of assistance, smiling pleasantly and treating the stranger with the most perfect courtesy. This did not succeed in disarming him, however, though it puzzled him considerably. Why should they be so eager to court inspection if they had anything to conceal?

Before her tent old Fennella sat, burnishing the images of her great god and her little god. At sight of an approaching *Gorgio* she hastily put them out of sight within the gloom behind her and resumed a piece of knitting, that the tribal deities might not suffer sacrilege by being exposed to the view of a Gentile.

The little group and its following formed themselves into a semicircle before the old woman, and a colloquy ensued, during which Delengro and the other man talked with her in Romany. More gypsies joined the crowd of listeners, and at one point, when the old lady had made a sharp retort to Delengro and he had turned red, replying nothing, the people exchanged knowing winks and laughed.

As Cecil could understand nothing of what was going on, he looked about him, searching the faces of the Egyptians for some clue to the whereabouts

of his elusive charmer, but there was nothing to be learned from their expressions. Then, just as his interest began to wane, a woman who stood on the far edge of the half-circle attracted his wandering eye, though there was really nothing very remarkable about her: a slight young woman, scarcely more than a child, yet bearing the promise of motherhood, she was listening eagerly to what was being said by the central group, and at intervals turning a glance toward himself. It was not difficult to discover that she was prepossessed in his favour, and that the conversation which the three at the tent door were carrying on concerned him even more than he had suspected. The woman interested him greatly, for she was peculiarly winning and innocent looking, and he wondered at the elaborate beauty of her dress.

"She declares there is and has been no such young woman in the camp, and, what's more, there are no milliners among us. She says, also, that you should have your fortune told."

There was every appearance of honesty and sincerity in the youth's tone, and Cecil was forced to accept his message, despite its one strange item: he had said nothing about milliners. How did they

know Lolli was one, if they did not know her? Unquestionably there was some trickery afoot, and he determined to see as much of the camp as possible before leaving. So he decided to have his palm read.

"Indeed I should like to have my fortune told," he replied pleasantly, and allowed himself to be led to where a handsome woman with an infant in her arms sat idly in a painted wagon.

When Delengro told her of Cecil's enforced desire to hear his future, she gave the baby into the care of an older child. Then, beckoning to the Scotchman, she led him into a neighbouring tent, and, dropping the flap, shut out the inquisitive crowd who followed. As the curtain fell, he was conscious that the richly apparelled woman was still looking at him from the distance.

The fortune-teller told him a great deal of nonsense, fixing him with her eye in the hypnotic manner of the professional, *dukkerer*, who always tries to charm a subject into confusion, as the origin of the word implies; but among her utterances were a few personal facts which were disagreeably true, for the woman was a keen psychologist. One item he laughingly denied:

"You will marry an heiress," she declared, her black eyes snapping at him approvingly.

"Not much! Never!" he disclaimed, emphatically.

"Ah! but you will!" she insisted calmly.

"Not if I know it!"

"You will do so," she persisted.

When he came out the crowd was still waiting, and Delengro invited him to walk about the camp. This gratuitous invitation must be offered for some ulterior motive, its recipient decided, and accepted it in order to test its meaning.

"Shall we turn this way?" asked the gypsy, indicating the left turn.

"I should prefer the other," replied Cecil, suspecting a motive in the suggestion, and helplessly conscious that he might be merely playing into the other's hands, no matter what he answered.

Delengro assented at once, and together with the crowd they made a pretty thorough tour of inspection. There were many curious things to be seen, but all appeared innocent enough, and one small incident became engraved upon his memory, despite his disturbed thoughts. Years afterward he could recall the little picture as clearly as though it had been newly

seen — yet it was unimportant enough. At the end of a particularly gorgeous wagon, in the very centre of the camp, a prim New England woman, well past middle age, was sitting. Upon her rigidly erect form was a stiffly starched calico dress, and an apron of spotless white was spread over her lap. Her sparse gray hair was drawn back tightly from her forehead and slicked down unmercifully, and upon her nose rested a pair of horn-rimmed spectacles. But more strange than her existence in such a spot was the incongruity between her figure and her facial expression; for, as she fashioned the tiny garment in her hand, her face was softened with an expression of great tenderness which sat strangely upon it.

It was plain in the end that the gypsies had merely wished to prove the sincerity of their statements, and even to his inquiring eye there did not seem to be any likely place of concealment for a prisoner. So he prepared to regain his driving seat, after having thanked his escort.

The crowd had gathered close around him, when, as he turned to give them farewell, he again perceived the pretty young woman in the fine clothes. What was she doing there? What held her attention upon him

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"They made a pretty thorough tour of inspection"

so closely. He paused and heard a boy call to her: "Miriam! The widow wants you!"

She did not hear at first, and the boy was obliged to repeat the message. Then she heeded and began making her way through the crowd toward him, saying as she went: "Poor woman, does she weep again? 'Tis sad, indeed, that a *romi* should lose her *rommado*."

Then, to his intense astonishment, she brushed by him closely, whispering as she did so: "Look for the Sleeping House! Look for the Sleeping House."

Then she was gone in the wake of the boy who had summoned her, and in another instant he was driving off, his brain in a whirl of wonder caused by her surreptitious message. It was evident that she had intended to help him in his quest for Lolli, and that she had done her utmost. Yet what was at the end of the slender thread of suggestion which she had put in his hands?

XIX

IS OF A SLEEPING HOUSE

IF HE could but guess what the woman meant! The phrase conveyed nothing definite, yet suggested a hundred possibilities. "*The Sleeping House! The Sleeping House!*" Evidently she had given him as much of a clue as she had dared; and, if she dared so little, surely some ugly business must be afoot. One lone man, ignorant of gypsy ways, was completely helpless when it came to coping with their antagonism and their cleverly veiled deceit. He must have help. Cecil recalled that the sheriff had said he was going to East Barrington that afternoon, and the simplest thing was to follow him there, find him, and ask his help. The little town could not be more than a mile or two away, and to reach it within the hour should be easy.

A small boy in ragged blue overalls was persuaded into giving a few directions as to the road to East

Barrington, which proved misleading, for Cecil drove according to them for an hour and a half without seeing any sign of the village; at the end of which time he concluded that the raggamuffin had known the road no better than he himself did, but had succumbed to the temptation of being taken for an authority — a common cause of fall from truth. The day was sultry. There was an ominous quiet in the air which set human nerves on edge with the tenseness belonging to an impending crisis, and sent the dumb creatures to cover, trembling and uneasy, though the sun still shone fitfully. How had the little village for which he was searching escaped him? Sick with apprehension, he desired above all things to reach a point from which he could begin his quest actively. In such a case there was but one thing to do—namely, choose a road and follow it undeviatingly until he got somewhere, which he was bound to do in the course of time — the road which has no ending being a rarity. So Cecil drove straight ahead — his custom in life when things puzzled him.

He soon noticed that the most conspicuous feature of the landscape was a uniform wire fence that enclosed all the pastures by which he drove. Arousing

himself from his anxious prognostications sufficiently to remark that it must bound some immense stock farm, he became conscious, too, of a towering, cliff-crowned hill in the middle distance. It was very impressive, its rugged barrenness enhanced by the fertility and painstaking cultivation out of which it lifted itself so sternly; and when he came to the highway running at its base he pulled up. The spot whereat he paused was a quarter of a mile, or less, from the base of the mountain, and the road by which he had come there crossed that on which he stood at a right-angle. As he gathered up the reins to start anew his glance fixed itself, for no apparent reason, upon something lying in the dust of the minor road. It was only a little maple-sprig, lying there with one of its three leaves broken — helplessly prone as a winged bird; but the sight of it caused his heart to leap. Surely — yes, certainly it was her *patterin!* And it bore the call for help. She had shown him all its various uses — he could hear her telling him about its secret calls in her sweet, eager tones. And somehow he felt certain that it was laid for him — that it was he whom she called and needed. At last, he would find her! Then came a cold wave of doubt. How

could he be sure that it was her token? Could not a twig with three maple leaves come to the roadside in any other way than by her hand? Perhaps! But, urged Hope, it was surely more than a coincidence that it should be found there at this very time when he was searching for her so anxiously! At any rate, it was impossible to ignore the silent message, whether it were a true one or not, and so, wheeling the horses about, he took the way which it commanded. He searched with anxious eyes for further signs, but found none until the crossing of the long, sheltered main road was reached, where, as he had hoped, lay another little green emblem, this time pointing north along the governmental highway.

The *patterin* — the *patterin!* Mystic call of love or friendship! Does it appear strange to you, Oh, reader, that so small a token could bear its message so truly, and show the way with such magnetic veracity? Ah! but do you know that for hundreds, perhaps thousands, of years, this same method has been used unfailingly by the keen-eyed Romany folk? That, by its means, brother has followed brother, children have sought their parents, the husband, borne jailward, has sent the message to his wife

which the keen eye of the law could not detect? That thus more than one woman has summoned her lover to her side, over many more miles than are found in all the length of the Berkshire Hills? So put your faith in it, for it is older than any form of message you wot of, and surer; and do not scoff at its simplicity, for of a verity, stranger things have happened than those which came from the laying of Lolli Plashta's *patterin.*

"The Sleeping House! The Sleeping House!" Never did knight of old keep a motto more tenderly at heart than Cecil did the gypsy woman's words, for now he felt that he had a clue to their meaning; and right and left he looked with care, but thus far no such house could he find — no house, indeed, of any sort.

It was growing late, and the evening light was turning to molten copper — as beautiful and as cruelly heated. The stillness increased until it became almost tangible, and the invisible sun set at last, leaving a bloody smudge upon the thickening bank of clouds. The wagon made an unearthly clatter amid all this quiet foreboding as it jounced along the hard, white road with a thundering which seemed like the noise in a dream. Cecil, as well as the beasts he drove,

seemed urged onward by some fearsome, compelling force with which they felt in sympathy but could not understand. The wagon rocked from side to side, its driver grasping the reins and brake, like some storm-driven mariner; and yet there was no storm, only quiet, quiet, and the growing, feverish darkness. The horses plunged ahead recklessly, swerving now this way and now that; and Cecil held them grimly, the while he never ceased to look for the house that was asleep. At the watering trough he paused that the beasts might quench their thirst, but, forgetting his own, sat looking with narrowed eyes at the threatening sky, where fire-rimmed black masses of cloud marshalled force after force. He turned the horses away, their soft, gray muzzles dripping from the spring, and resumed the journey to where a new range of hills loomed darkly. Here the road grew steep and narrow. It was the mountain pass. Soon the way became impenetrable for the wagon, and the darkness fell, obliterating the road and its surroundings. Cecil dismounted and endeavoured to lead the horses forward, but in vain; the upper portion of the load had become entangled in the lower branches of some invisible tree, and, try as he might, he was unable

to stir it. Then he tried backing it down the incline with as little success. The road was too narrow and dangerous to permit of his turning, and even a first hand investigation, carried on at peril of his neck, only revealed the fact that his idea of an entangled branch was sound. At every move of the wagon a crackling took place which bode ill for the shining new furniture. He urged the horses to a final effort, leading them forward by the bridle — and then a lot of alarming things occurred in rapid succession. A shower of new furniture came about him with a crash, and, what was perhaps worse, the horses got the greater part of it, so that, already nervous and excited, the inevitable happened. Snorting and kicking they broke away, and Cecil had barely time to jump aside before they plunged into the woods, directly across the spot where an instant before he had been standing, wrecking the wagon and freeing themselves from it as though under the impression that it was a demon about to seize them. Pursuit was impossible, and he could only pick himself up and thank his stars that he had not gone over into the gulley with most of his stock in trade. As he arose from the bank to which he had sprung for safety

something sharp struck against his hand. He seized the object and discovered it to be one of his lanterns which had caught in a bush. Feeling for matches, he discovered some in his coat pocket and was soon surveying the wreckage. The road was strewn with splintered furniture, and the wagon, careened upon the hill side of the road, stuck fast between two large trees. The horses were nowhere to be seen, nor could they be heard. Cecil swore a single oath at the ill-fortune which had deprived him of his means of travel, and then, lantern in hand, set his face to the north again, the way of the *patterin*.

Swinging the little disk of light to right and left, he entered the pass. Here he paused and searched the ground with care. It was the beginning of a new road to all practical purposes, and the sign might be there; but, though he searched carefully, he could not find it. Then he reasoned that as the last twig had pointed north, that was the direction to be maintained until a contradictory one was found, and so decided, he began the ascent of the mountain, the lantern's light bobbing about him like some mischievous will-o'-the-wisp.

For several hours, he toiled through the sultry dark-

ness. The storm still held off, and he kept on steadily, tirelessly, ever vigilant in his watch for the Sleeping House. The words rang in his head with the sound of his footsteps. Sleeping House! Sleeping House! *Right*, left! *Right*, left! — till at last the mountain was crossed.

Two white objects glimmered by the roadside, and he paused to examine them. Gate posts! His heart leaped. A house at last! Perhaps *the* house. On the almost impossible chance, he swept the ground between the soapstone columns with his light, and there before his incredulous eyes it lay the true Romany message once again — the silent cry, the sign of her distress — the maple *patterin* laid true and straight and pointing inward, its outline like some carrier-pigeon with a broken wing. She was here, he had reached his goal! He extinguished his light and crouched down by the nearest post. What next? For the first time since the beginning of the adventure Cecil realized the desirability of having a weapon, and he was without one.

He crouched silently for some time, alert for the least sound from the direction of the house, whose outlines he could barely distinguish. The building

was dark and still as the night itself. Who, beside Lolli, was in there? How many were guarding her?

Presently he began to crawl toward the house, keeping in the long grass and making the approach circuitously. Every few moments he paused to listen for the step of some guard, but there appeared to be none, for he managed to reach the right wing undisturbed.

A moment's inspection satisfied him that this portion of the house, at any rate, did not contain any one. It was a mere shell, only the outer walls remaining and the roof having fallen in. He turned his attention to the main body of the house.

The silence and the loneliness made the place fairly uncanny.

After creeping along close to the crumbling wall for about twenty feet, he came upon the front door. He stood erect and examined it as best he could, discovering by means of a few moments' fumbling that it was completely boarded up and immovable. To attempt to get in here would be to bring the entire household — if, indeed, there was such — upon him instantly. There must be a second entrance, he reasoned, and so set out to find it. Soon he came

upon it, and in a few moments he was gently trying the latch of what must originally have been the kitchen door. It, too, was strongly fastened, and for a moment he paused, nonplussed. Not a glimmer of light showed anywhere. So deathlike was the stillness that he almost doubted that any one could be within, and, putting his ear to the door panels, he tried to discover some sound of life. But either there was none, or the wood was too thick to admit of his hearing it, and, encouraged by this, he moved to an adjoining window, one of the few not barred with heavy shutters, and began running his hands over the small, square panes of glass. He very shortly discovered one which was broken, and, slipping his hand through, he managed to dislodge the stick which held it shut. With a clatter which echoed loudly in his ears, the prop fell to the bare floor, and for long moments Cecil stood as if paralyzed, every nerve striving to discover if any one within had heard it; but only the same ghastly stillness reigned, intensified a hundredfold by the preceding clamour. Then it occurred to him that perhaps the noise had not been so violent as his overstrung nerves had led him to fancy, and, putting his hand in again, he raised the sash

gently, put down his unlighted lantern on the floor, and entered.

The boards were thick with the dust of years, and it swirled sluggishly in the heavy air as he stepped in. The room was bare of furniture as far as he could reach on either hand, but seemed otherwise intact. Very carefully, testing each board with his foot before putting his weight upon it, he stole along the wall, inch by inch, until a door was reached. This stood partly open, but the blackness beyond revealed nothing. He passed through, and was about to relight his little lantern to explore the better, when a faint sound broke upon his ear. Instantly he became rigid with attention. Yes, it was something breathing — the heavy, regular breathing of deep sleep. That eerie sensation which reveals a presence besides our own told him that the person, or creature, was in the same room with him. What its nature might be, man or beast, he must discover at once. With infinite care he crept toward the spot from which the sound seemed to come. The creature's breathing continued deep and undisturbed, and gradually he lessened the distance between them.

Suddenly he touched a great, yielding bulk, and as suddenly he drew back and waited anxiously. It was

a man who lay prone upon the floor. Although Cecil's touch had not been a gentle one, the man did not awaken, and after a moment the intruder struck a match and saw the face. It was a brutish one, and the cause of his oblivion was plain at once. The young fellow lay in a drunken stupour.

The flare of the wax taper had revealed the circumstance that the room was otherwise vacant, and a number of empty bottles beside the sleeping gypsy told the story plainly. It also sent a throb of sickening fear through Cecil's heart. What drunken debauch had been held here during the preceding hours? And Lolli! Good God! he dare not think. Turning from the revolting sleeper, he stepped out into the hall, recklessly courageous in the face of the terrible thoughts racing through his mind.

The halls were as bare as the portions of the house through which he had already passed, and as silent. Ah! but was it? From across the yawning blackness he could distinguish a sound of sobbing, which seemed to come from somewhere beyond. Then he saw a faint streak of light close to the floor in the same direction. In two strides he had crossed to it and was beating upon a locked door.

"Open, open!" he commanded, but only the sound of his own voice echoed back through the corridor in reply. The sobbing had ceased.

Cecil was a strong man and the door was an old one, and hardly had he put his shoulder to it, knotting his muscles into great bunches, than the door gave away with a crash, and he found himself face to face with Lolli, who had arisen from her corner at the sound of his voice. In another instant she was in his arms, and he was pressing her close, close, murmuring incoherently, in a broken voice, as he kissed her repeatedly, and great tears of relief streamed down his face.

"Oh, Cecil," she cried, clinging to him, "I thought you would never come!"

"And are you safe, dear — are you safe?" he pleaded again.

"I am not hurt, but, oh, so terribly frightened!" she said. "It has been a day and two nights — such horrible nights, and I have not dared to sleep."

She clasped her hands behind his head, crying weakly and calling him fond names.

"Where are they?" he asked gently. "There is only one outside, that I can see, and he is drunk. Surely there are others?"

"I think they went out — probably for more whiskey," she whispered, "or perhaps for food. But they have been gone a long time and may return at any moment. Let us go quickly before they come back!"

"Are there any horses, do you think?" he asked. "We shall need them."

"I heard the two others ride away on theirs — but there may be Pedro's," she replied.

"Come, then, dearest love; take your cloak, and we will go and find it. We had best be moving at once."

He put the long red garment about her, folding her to him again for a moment. Then, one arm about her, he crossed the room toward the lantern, which gave a faint light, standing upon the wide, low mantelshelf. He had no sooner grasped the loop of iron which formed its swinging handle, than there was a glare of lightning and the long delayed storm broke with a deafening crash which shook the old house to its very foundation. Then Lolli gave a terrified scream, and, turning, he beheld the evil face of Lasho Balormengro grinning at them from the doorway.

XX

TELLS HOW THE SLEEPING HOUSE AWAKES

THE first words which Lasho Balormengro uttered at sight of Cecil in the heart of his stronghold were essentially characteristic of him.

"'Tis well, O Sacki," said the gyspy king to some one behind him, without, however, turning his head. "'Tis well, I arrived to-night. A pretty set of guardians yer makes for my birdling! I sees you even lets her lover visit her. Doubtless they has been well amused!"

He drew back his lips in a meaning sneer, and in another breath Cecil had struck him full in the face with the lighted lantern, which was extinguished by the force of the blow.

Again the lightning flashed, revealing for an instant the room filled, as it seemed, with struggling shapes. Then came the thunder, fierce and sharp. A tree in

the yard had been shattered and the clouds acclaimed over the victory. The gypsies shouted and swore, striking each other by mistake in the darkness and confusion. The wind outside had risen to the force of a gale, singing through the bending trees and banging some distant, loose shutter or door against its jarring casing. Lasho shouted and swore in Romany, hitting out blindly. Then a third flash revealed the position of his enemy.

Cecil had taken up his stand with his back to the chimney-piece, and beneath it crouched Lolli. He still carried the remains of the broken lantern, its iron frame proving a rather effective weapon. His face was white and bleeding, and his coat had been torn badly upon the shoulder.

"Come on, you swine!" he cried, with a string of hearty English oaths.

And Lasho sprang at him with a wolfish snarl, only to be driven back by a smashing blow from the lantern. Then it was dark again, but the men had seen him and rushed to the attack.

Desperately he staved them off — there were two besides Lasho, as the lightning had shown him — and one of these he sent tumbling into unconsciousness

with a chance blow upon the head. For the moment the lantern's wide sweep was saving them, but he could not keep up its steady swing indefinitely; in another moment or two the enemy would close in upon them, and then? He dared not move for fear of exposing Lolli, yet move they must, and in some way gain the door. It was their only chance. Yet how to do so? Lasho made a second attempt to close, dropping upon his hands and knees and crawling, under cover of the darkness toward Cecil's feet, thinking to overturn him unawares. He was within two inches of accomplishing his purpose when there came a timely flash of lightning. Crash! Down came the heavy lantern upon the gypsy's neck. The blow was swift as the light itself. Then the thick darkness and a heavy fall and a scramble as Lasho withdrew himself from range. On the return swing the lantern had caught the other active assailant under the jaw, and sent him reeling back upon the edge of the broken door, against which he struck and fell unconscious.

There now remained only Lasho, who seemed invulnerable. Cecil felt that his own strength was failing him. Thank Heaven, the drunken Pedro seemed still unconscious, but even now it was too unequal a

combat to last long. The thought of his helpless little love crouching there behind him lent him strength. In spite of all the tremendous odds — he had to win, to win — dear God! He must win somehow!

The last flash of lightning had shown him that he was dealing with only one opponent, and by his quietness he knew that the gypsy king was at some strategic movement; and so it proved. When the lightning flashed again, Lasho was under his arm, and in another moment they had grappled.

Lolli shrieked, and clutched at Cecil's shoulder as he swayed in the giant's grasp, but as her breath brushed his cheek for an instant he managed to whisper fiercely, "the window!" and to move free of her.

The storm howled and moaned around the house, but the room which had been resounding with cries and oaths suddenly became very quiet save for the shuffling sound of the men's feet upon the boarded floor as they swayed up and down it. Now and then some one gasped a bit, but that was all. Lolli, obedient to Cecil's word, had stolen to the long window and was busy with the fastenings which she had undone a hundred times before in the hope of escape, only

to be baffled by the sturdy outside shutters reaching to the ground, which resisted her utmost strength. She desisted at last, and leaned fearfully against them, listening to the muffled sounds of the struggle.

Lasho had fastened to Cecil, but the latter's superior skill was once more standing him in good stead. Lasho's holds were strong, if not clever, and Cecil did not waste much strength upon him, content to defend himself, and wait for a final opportunity, which it began to seem to him would never come. In a last desperate struggle he would muster all his strength, but at present (Lasho, also, thinking it only a question of minutes before Cecil would be completely overcome) he was content to bide his time. With consummate cleverness, the Scotchman let himself be borne backward as though he were losing ground, and then, with a skilful fall, surprised the gypsy and forced all his intention upon holding him, while Cecil was edging inch by inch nearer to the open door. Then the chance arrived.

The rain had poured down in torrents and the wind had shrieked as loudly as ever, but for some little time there had been no lightning, and it was this pause in the storm which had delayed Cecil's plan. The

thunder began anew, and, after the first crash, he fought in such a way as to deceive his opponent into loosening his hold upon him somewhat. Cecil waited thus a hair's breadth space of time. Then came the lightning, and simultaneously he pressed with all his might upon his enemy, and, clearing him, made a spring for he door, vanishing into the darkness at the same time that the lightning faded. The astonished man picked himself up as quickly as he could, and thundered out into the hallway in pursuit.

But Cecil had not gone through the door. He had gone past it, and before the pursuit had reached the door sill he was at Lolli's side by the window. Picking the girl up in his arms he put his shoulder to the barred shutter, and in another moment they crashed out into the raging storm.

The storm was at its height, and the rain whipped about the pair in solid sheets of water, instantly drenching them both to the skin. Cecil, one arm round Lolli's shoulders, half lifting her, advanced slowly, peering about to gauge his direction, his feet sinking deep into the mud at every step. It was imperative that they should reach the road at once, and, if possi-

ble, secure at least one of the horses before they got away. In which of the various outbuildings had the gypsies stabled them? He advanced a little farther into the yard. Here they stumbled upon a thick clump of shrubs, tall and straggling, but affording no shelter. The well which had supplied the house stood in their midst, and over it was a crazy roof, more dangerous than efficient as a protection; but under it they paused, and, facing the stables, awaited the next flash of lightning. From the house came muffled cries vaguely borne upon the gale. The ruse had evidently been discovered, the drunken Pedro aroused, and a search instigated. But how to reach the stables? To leave Lolli alone while he attempted to secure a mount was out of the question, for she might be recaptured at any moment during his absence. He would very likely have to search all the sheds before finding the horses. No, that was not to be thought of. Then in a momentary glare from the angry heavens he saw Lasho standing in the door of the main stable, a shining object, evidently a knife, clutched in his hand. The man's first thought, on finding his prisoner gone, had been for the horses. That way, then, was closed; the thing must be man-

aged on foot. The swift light had shown him where the gate to the road lay, and in that direction he made off, still supporting Lolli, who was half fainting. Then began a nightmare, journey.

The dust which had lain so thickly upon the roads was now churned to muddy streams which washed over bounds here and there, obliterating the way. The darkness was terrible, and all nature bent moaning before the wind. Like a blind man, Cecil struggled on until he judged that half a mile, at least, lay between him and the Sleeping House — the house which had just witnessed so strange a dream. A mighty elm tree grew close to the road, and in the lea of its wide column he made Lolli rest, and, scarce conscious of the ache in his shoulders, knelt beside her so as to shield her as much as possible, chafing her cold hands, and calling her name in agonized tones, trying to arou e her. Would she never stir? It seemed an age before she recovered from the long semi-faint. He slipped an arm beneath her head and wiped the rain from her face as best he could. Still she lay passive. With a groan he lifted her into his weary arms and prayed for daylight. There was a warm stream trickling from her hair — blood! Then it was

more than an ordinary faint. Pitiful Heaven, how much was she hurt!

As though in answer to his cry, she revived and with a feeble, inarticulate sound, put both her arms about his neck. His heart gave a great bound of relief, and for several moments he held her fast, new life entering into him at her touch. So long as she lived, he could keep hope that they would win out. The darkness, the storm, the strangeness of their situation, the suddenness of their new relationship, all had combined to exaggerate the adventure to gigantic emotional proportions. He felt, as he held her thus, as though he stood alone against the world. Her voice recalled him to action.

"If you have a handkerchief, I will tie up my head; it aches rather, and I think it's bleeding a little."

It was so like her old, practical self that he could have shouted for joy. In a very short space of time the bandage was adjusted, her skilful fingers guiding his clumsy ones at the task. Then she struggled to a sitting posture.

"Can you walk a bit now, my darling?" he asked anxiously. "We ought to try to find some shelter. I can carry you most of the way."

She let him help her to her feet and stood clinging to his arm, swaying a little as she spoke, her voice ringing bravely.

"There is not a house or barn within four miles, except the one we have just left," she said with a little laugh. Then, "Are they all dead?" she whispered.

For a moment he thought her mind must be wandering, and then he understood, and in his haste to relieve her mind forgot to smile at her generous estimate of his prowess.

"None are killed, I hope," he said. "I knocked out two, though, I think, but that devil Balormengro may come after us — he is not easily daunted. We cannot stay here, that is plain for more than one reason. Do you know the roads?"

"Yes," she assured him, "and I am pretty sure about there being no houses. If we could find the way across the fields, though, there is a farm not more than two miles off."

"Do you feel able to make it?" he asked. And when she assented bravely, he passed an arm about her again, and slowly they ploughed on against the wind.

That they should lose the way was a foregone conclusion. They made no attempt to find the short cut, but before they had travelled far the road became obliterated and they found themselves straggling through a broken field. Even Lolli's sense of direction and mysterious knowledge of growing things failed them, the confusion of forces that was abroad seeming to paralyze her power, and soon they were hopelessly astray. The night seemed a thousand hours long, and the girl weakened at every step. The road must have vanished, for find it again they could not. At last Cecil clung to the one fixed idea: to keep moving away from the Sleeping House.

"I think," he remarked, as he picked Lolli up from her fifth stumble, "that some things get past tragedy: I'm really awfully sorry you fell, dearest, but I want most dreadfully to laugh."

"It's the nervous strain," said she practically, and promptly fainted again.

A seemingly endless grove of young beeches grew beside a brook, their slender trunks bending like rushes before the wind, and their murmurings raised to a wild flutter of protest. A sort of path wound through it, along which he carried her, now walking steadily

enough, now crashing into the little trees and almost losing his footing. The brook beside him roared and tumbled furiously over its rocky bed, swollen to twice its normal flood. The flashes of light grew less frequent and the thunder was passing beyond the hills, only rumbling distantly, but the rain did not let up. The absence of lightning made progress increasingly difficult, and Lolli's weight became intolerable. But he must reach shelter; it was impossible to pause where they were: it seemed incredible that none should yet be at hand, for the valleys as a rule had farms scattered through them, though sparsely, and he had purposely avoided the hills with their treacherous woodlands and unexpected chasms. In all probability this very valley in which they were was not more than half a mile in width, and he had travelled far. Surely they must be getting somewhere!

Lolli recovered again after a while, but was unable to walk alone. They neither of them spoke except in monosyllables, but she made him put her down, and, with the support of his arm about her waist, they continued the search for the road. At last they came upon it, and with it partial shelter at least, for a thick pine grove of ancient trees with interwoven

branches skirted it at one side. The fragrance of its atmosphere stung their senses very pleasantly, and entering a little way — but not too far from the dearly found road — they settled themselves where the boughs were thickest, and in comparative shelter awaited the day. Lolli laid her tired little head upon Cecil's shoulder, and. worn out by her long vigil, fell asleep; and he, waking yet dreaming, watched until the rain ceased and the vault above them turned to gray, and saw the dawn flinging the branches of the pines into bold relief against the sky and tinting them with crimson on the eastern side. Lolli stirred slightly and from the folds of her cloak dropped a paper, hidden there on the day she found herself prisoner in the gypsy camp. As it fell open before him, Cecil's astonished eyes saw the portrait and read the legend:

MISS BARBARA CHICHESTER
The Popular Débutante
Whose Mysterious Disappearance Is Causing Her Family Much Alarm

He looked at the picture earnestly, incredulously, for a moment and then at the sleeping Lolli, then at the picture again. Obviously they were one and the same person! Yet how strange! He read the account

of the heiress's disappearance with care, and, at each period of the journalist's lurid story, turned to look upon the girl beside him in increased wonder. And then he laughed gently, that he might not wake her. So it was Barbara Chichester whom he had fallen in love with!

But somehow he felt no great surprise, nor indeed any emotion beyond a certain mild amusement — the situation was beyond words, after all. Only one definite thought came to him in this new connection, which was that Lolli's — no, Barbara's — parents must be wired to at first opportunity; that is, he would wire Toots and she would inform them and she would say that he had builded better than he knew. . . . What a funny world it was! He smiled a little, and murmured an "oh, dear me," his customary exclamation under really great pressure of any kind. What a funny world!

The morning air was strong and sweet, and the light filtered coolly through the dark green of the pines. The birds that had been whispering for an hour past broke into song, and at the birth of the glorious young day he looked upon his little lady's wan face as she lay upon his shoulder, and

his heart was filled with thankfulness. Very gently he gathered her into his arms without awakening her, and stepped out into the clean-swept road. Smooth as an untrodden beach it ran before him, dipping gently into the distance from the little eminence on which he stood. A thousand *patterins* of all denominations lay upon it, spread in the trail of the wild gypsy night that had passed that way, and turned to all quarters of the compass. The pale sunlight fell upon bowed flowers and bushes and the spring grass lay prone. The trees seemed dressed in new green, and overhead the sky was a vault of innocent, cloudless blue. Already the earth was sending up a warm, grateful perfume, and the valley mists had vanished. And, oh, most gracious sight of all! Down the road, not a quarter of a mile away, arose a thin spiral of gray smoke, motionless in the clear atmosphere, where the broad bend of a hospitable roof showed above the trees! With a thankful heart he started for it at once, still without awakening Lolli, who lay in the deep stupor of utter exhaustion.

XXI

EXPLAINS SOME IMPORTANT THINGS

IN LADY HYLLIARY'S sitting room a curious dialogue was being spoken, for the Anglo-American was hearing the confession of her sister, or, to be correct, was extracting it from her. Janet's sharp, quick questions were thrown at Adele with a force which elicited a breathless answer to each one.

"So Jack left under the impression that you had been untrue to him?"

"Yes," said Adele; "I began at the wrong end of the story. I told him that Barbara was Lasho's daughter, but I did not tell him who her mother was."

"I see," said Lady Hylliary, "and who, in heaven's name, was her mother, if you are not?"

"Our sister Barbara," said Adele.

There was an instant of strained silence. From the

hot city, far, far below, the life sounds came faint and confused through the awning-sheltered window.

"I suppose it will surprise you," added Mrs. Chichester, "and, as for Jack, he doesn't even know I ever had any sister but you."

"Do you mean to tell me, Adele," said Lady Hylliary, "that Jack has never known about poor Barbara?"

"Never," affirmed Adele passionately "I believed he would consider her a disgrace to us, and I have paid her villain of a husband, Lasho Balormengro, thousands of dollars to keep silence about her, and his connection with us."

"And so Barbara is *their* child! That explains many things. But you have kept the secret well. Even I have never suspected that she was not your own. Why did you do this thing?

"I found I could never have a child, and Jack's coming into his inheritance depended upon our having one. You see, it wasn't the money I cared about — indeed it wasn't; but I knew how bitterly disappointed Jack would be, and ——"

"Wait! Let me ask something else. *When* did you accomplish your deception?"

"Oh, it was so pitifully simple! Jack went home to New York before I completed my visit to you in England, and soon after, you will remember, you and your husband were called away suddenly to India. It was then that I did it. The opportunity was perfect, and I had been watching for such a chance ever since I had known how important our having a child was in Jack's eyes."

"Why did you not confide in him?" asked Lady Hylliary with her customary directness.

"For two reasons," replied Adele. "First, because I was afraid he wouldn't care for me so much if he knew the truth; and, second, I wanted to bear all blame and legal responsibility in case any trouble came of the deception."

Lady Hylliary gave her sister a sympathetic glance, and then, stiffening suddenly, walked to the window and, looking out, said in a queer, smothered sort of voice.

"Now tell me about Barbara — our sister Barbara. You know I was always very fond of her, and I would have kept in touch with her if I could have found her — even after father disowned her on Lasho's account."

"It was within a few miles of your own house in Warwickshire that I found her," answered Adele. "I had been out riding by myself and was walking my horse down a little bridle lane when I heard cries from some woman, evidently in great distress. I dismounted to go and see what the trouble was, and there in a grove I came upon the remains of a gypsy camp. Oh, Janet! It was such a miserable place! Without even the ordinary decencies of existence, and there was our poor Barbara, ill — pitifully ill. I was frantic, as you can imagine, for I am so stupidly ignorant about sickness. By and by, though, an old gypsy woman came, and the little Barbara — my Barbara — was born."

Lady Hylliary made a queer noise which it would be difficult to class and said:

"Well?"

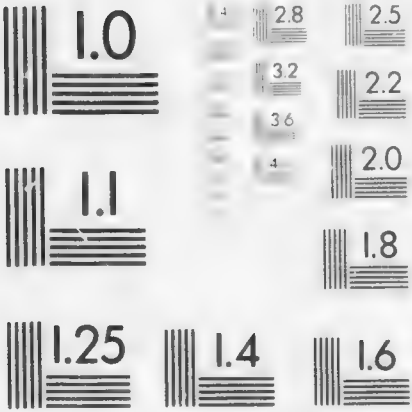
"Our sister died," said Adele slowly, "and I took the baby with me then and there."

"And Lasho?"

"Lasho did not even suspect the child's existence, for he had deserted his wife," said Adele. "He has always thought Barbara mine."

MICROCOPY RESOLUTION TEST CHART

ANSI and ISO TEST CHART No. 2



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"Did Barbara — our sister, I mean — say anything?" asked Lady Hylliary.

"Nothing coherent," said Adele. "She babbled about a maple twig with a broken leaf, and of nothing else. I cannot think what she meant, but in her delirium she begged Lasho to see it."

Lady Hylliary threw back her head sharply, and murmured something which the other did not hear.

"But, Oh, Janet!" exclaimed Mrs. Chichester miserably, "can't you help me to find Jack, and to explain it all to him? I shall *die* if I don't clear up this horrible idea he has. I have been wicked about it all, but I am not so bad as that!"

Lady Hylliary roused herself with an effort, and stepping to the portières which divided the room from the next one pulled them aside, and John Chichester entered. Lady Hylliary left them together.

"Jack!" cried Adele in amazement. Then entreatingly, "Oh, Jack!"

"Poor little wife," he said tenderly, and took her in his arms.

And it was thus that Lady Hylliary and Samuel Prescott found them, when, half an hour later, they

burst into the room unannounced. In his anxiety about the long and strangely absent Cecil, the Socialist had taken a train for New York, going straight to Lady Hylliary's hotel. When they made their appearance both were too excited to admit of their commenting upon the sentimental situation in which they found Jack and Adele

"What do you think!" cried Janet. "Mr. Prescott is going to get five thousand Socialists to bring their wives to a great meeting so that I can address them! It will do more ——"

"We will erect a tent for the purpose on my farm," broke in Prescott, "so that the people can be accom ——"

"Is that what you have rushed in so breathlessly to tell us?" asked Chichester, laughing.

"Why no!" exclaimed his sister-in-law, stopping short in the midst of her enthusiasm, as one who suddenly recollects something important. "Of course that's not what we came for, but this idea occurred to us, and we almost forgot the real news. We came to bring this — I have just received it." She held up a telegram. "I'll make no comment upon it. You read it yourselves."

She handed the missive to Chichester, who spread it upon the table and together he and Adele read as follows:

LEE, MASS., July 4.

To LADY HYLLIARY,
Hotel Blank, N. Y.

Barbara safe with me. Caught after a long chase. We will celebrate the date fittingly. Letter follows.

CECIL.

"Thank heaven!" said Chichester solemnly, and his wife echoed his words.

"But I wonder just what he means by *celebrating*," mused the sharp-witted Lady Hylliary.

XXII

LIKE CHAPTER I, REFERS TO MARRIAGE

AS CECIL with his precious lady in his arms approached the house it began to look more and more familiar, and when he rounded the hedge and saw the white picket fence and riotous mass of flowers, tired as he was, he recognized it with a shout of glee. These broad gables and this rose-covered porch, these shell-bordered paths and hospitably open doors identified it at once as the home of those widely renowned ornaments of the Dramatic Art, Mr. and Mrs. Lewellen B. Protheroe!

Early as it was, the good lady herself was already in the garden, busily engaged in repairing the ravages of the storm. The marigolds and the petunias all lay grovelling on the earth, their striped cups filled with sand. The tender ruffles of hollyhock and nasturtium were torn and bedraggled, and a whole row of late hyacinths had blown over and lay among the

fragments of their earthen dishes. Even the early blossoms of the rambler rose were matted together with rain, and the bulky form of their presiding genius was at this moment bowed over a bed of young gladiolis which she was setting to rights with her delicate, definite touch, patting the earth around each rescued plant with a vigour which seemed to reprove its carelessness in allowing such accidents to occur. Her brown dress of linsey-woolsey, serviceable and lovely of colour, ballooned about her as she stooped, and above her broad white collar and rosy face spread a snowy sunbonnet, as starched and frilled as the very morning itself.

"My dear lady," remarked Cecil, conversationally, "it is rather an unusual hour for paying a call, I'm aware — but may we come in, informally?"

At the sound of his voice she arose with some difficulty and turned about, her face very pink from the effort the action cost her; and when she caught sight of his ragged figure, with its pathetic burden, up went her hands in their huge, yellow gardening gloves, and for a moment she could only gasp for astonishment.

"Land's sake, dear!" she managed to ejaculate

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"'Land's sakes, dear!' she managed to ejaculate at length. 'What has happened?'"

at length. "What has happened? Has there been a battle?"

"Of a kind," he assented. "And Lolli here is utterly worn out. May I put her in your care?"

"The poor child!" cried Mrs. Protheroe, waddling to the gate as fast as she could, and opening it for him. "Where was it? Last night? Oh, my Dramatic Soul, how awful!"

The sound of voices had evidently disturbed Mr. Protheroe, who was not yet arisen, for he put his head (in an old-fashioned nightcap) out of an upper window and, just as the three below were entering the porch, demanded in his most Pecksniffian tones:

"What unseemly disturbance is this?"

He looked very impressive and solemn in spite of the nightcap, and his wife seemed to feel that an explanation was due him, for she replied as she hustled Cecil with his fair charge through the door:

"It is young Fitz-Williams, our admirer, Mr. Protheroe, and the peddler girl, all bandaged up. There has been a battle and I don't know what not! Come right down and go for the doctor and the police!"

"A battle!" quoth her lesser half, pulling a long face and elevating his eyebrows alarmingly in the

"surprise" expression which he was wont to use of old. "Surely there is no war? But methinks I *did* hear a rumbling as of cannon in the night! I will descend as soon as I am apparelled."

Here he withdrew the nightcap and vanished into the privacy of his chamber. Mr. Protheroe, be it noted, had slept soundly through the night, and when he spoke of cannon, doubtless he referred to the thunder of the heavens which had only partially penetrated the depths of his slumbers.

Cecil carried the sleeping girl up the broad, shallow stairs, into a wide room overlooking the sunlit meadows, and laid her tenderly upon a great bed with carved posts and a flowered canopy. The peace and order of the place, with its quaint furniture and spotless nicety, made the past hours seem an impossible unreality. The ex-actress bustled about solicitously, asking innumerable questions without waiting for a reply, and finally turned him out of the room with the injunction to "find Mr. Protheroe, dear, and get dry clothes from him." Which order he promptly obeyed, catching a glimpse of a scarred and haggard countenance in a mirror as he passed, and not recognizing it as himself until after he had gone by.

Half an hour later, shaved, bathed, beplastered, and bedecked in an ancient broadcloth suit, soft stock, and flowered waistcoat belonging to Mr. Protheroe's collection of costumes (he had been unable to get into that gentleman's narrow-shouldered, modern clothes), Cecil, after having sent off his telegram to Lady Hylliary, sat down to an amazingly good breakfast with his kind hosts and gave them an account of his adventures since he saw them last, to which they listened with all the keenness of those to whom a dramatic situation is as meat and drink. They could not say enough to express their amazement and interest, nor show him sufficient solicitude, plying him with food and cheer and offers of their service. And, indeed, the quaint clothes and heroic pallor, accentuated by the plaster on his cheek, became him well, and satisfied their sense of the fitness of his narrative. Only one fact he suppressed for fear of spoiling the footing on which they accepted him; and that was his own real identity. When they arose from table he made particular inquiry about Lolli — had he not better go for a physician at once?

"Not at all, dear," said the fat old lady. "She'll be all right without — only tired, poor bird, and a

scratch on her pretty white scalp. She's awake now, and you may go up for a moment if you wish."

"Indeed, I do wish," he cried, with such heartiness that she laughed at him.

When she had led him to the door she returned to her husband, who was sitting in the sunshine on the little porch. With a happy sigh she seated herself beside him and spread her white apron smooth. Out in the garden the flowers were straightening themselves gallantly, and the dew was drying fast. No sound of the nation's noisy holiday reached this quiet corner of the world.

"Is the young hero with his lady?" asked the old man.

"Yes, they are together," she answered softly.

"Journeys end in lovers' meeting," he quoted. In his younger days Lew Protheroe had aspired to Shakespearian rôles, but fate had decreed otherwise.

Mrs. Protheroe slipped a plump pink hand into her husband's thin yellow one, and gave another happy sigh which swelled the brown linsey-woolsey bosom of her gown alarmingly.

"What a pretty world it is," she murmured in her mellow voice. "What a *very* pretty world!"

For a while they sat so, hand in hand, silently. How golden the sunlight was! A pollen-dusty bee boomed among the ramblers, and on the gentle breeze came a sweet whiff of warm mignonette. Then the quaintly clothed figure of Cecil appeared in the doorway. His eyes were alight and his cheeks slightly flushed. He was a goodly sight.

"Is there anything I can do for you, sir?" asked Mr. Protheroe, involuntarily.

"Yes," replied Cecil smiling. "Will you please show me where the parson lives?"

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